

# Daniel 3 – Facing The Fiery Furnace

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## Nebuchadnezzar Erects An Image And Demands Everyone Worship It (1)

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits; he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

There is considerable debate regarding when this happened. Some think it was a short time after the events of Daniel 2, but others think it happened many years later. There is a discernible link between Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and the image he made in Daniel 3. It seems that Nebuchadnezzar deliberately made an *entire* statue of gold, saying that the day of his reign and authority would never end, in contradiction to God's declared plan.

**An image of gold:** According to some scholars, the image was more like a stylized obelisk than a normal statue, being 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. Being so large, it is safe to say that it was not made of solid gold but probably wood overlaid with gold. This was a common method of construction in the ancient world. It is said that one can see, on the plains of Dura today, a rectilinear mound, about twenty feet high, an exact square of about forty-six feet at the base, resembling the pedestal of a colossal statue.

## All Babylonia's dignitaries gathered at the dedication of the image (2-3)

Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the satraps, the Then administrators, the deputies, and the governors, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up (ASV).

**Gather together the satraps:** **Satrap** is a Persian word that means "protector of the realm." It refers to a specific category of public officials; one with great authority who ruled on behalf of the emperor (Nelson).

**All the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image:** The demand that all come to the dedication ceremony means that Nebuchadnezzar meant to use the worship of this image as a test of allegiance.

## The Command To Worship The Image (4-6)

Then the herald cried aloud, to you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace (ASV).

**Horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery:** Some of the musical instruments are difficult to define precisely but the idea is clear. This was an impressive orchestra. The use of the Aramaic words for **lyre**, **psaltery** and **symphony** has led some critics to say that the book of Daniel was written hundreds of years after the time of Daniel. They say this because these particular words are

Aramaic words borrowed from Greek words and supposedly Daniel did not have these words at his disposal in the sixth century B.C. and they supposedly did not come into the Hebrew vocabulary until the third century B.C. Nevertheless, ancient records tell us there were Greeks in the region of Assyria, Babylon and Persia as far back as the *eighth* century B.C. Archaeology also proves beyond a doubt that Greek mercenaries fought and made military settlements in and around Judea before the time of Daniel.

**Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace:** The command is followed by a threat. Nebuchadnezzar regarded those refusing to worship the image as *treason*, and as a religious offense. You can make a man bow the knee but you cannot make him bow his heart. Nebuchadnezzar was not a man who allowed lawbreakers to go unpunished.

### **The Crowd Obeys Nebuchadnezzar's Command (7)**

Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

**When all the people heard the sound:** Nebuchadnezzar's grand idolatry was accompanied by music - elaborate and well-produced music. The people were stirred up by the music. This reminds us of the great inherent power in music, both for good and for evil. **Fell down and worshiped the gold image:** the people literally fell to their knees. There was total and immediate obedience to Nebuchadnezzar's command!

### **Three Hebrew Men Refuse - Certain Chaldeans Accuse The Three Hebrew Men (8-12)**

But there were three in that great company who paid no heed to the king's commandment. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to bow. Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and brought accusation against the Jews. They answered and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king, O king, live forever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image: and whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (ASV)

These Chaldeans had an obvious political motivation against these Jews who were promoted to high office along with Daniel in the events recorded in the previous chapter. **They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image:** Apparently their failure to worship the image was not discovered until these certain Chaldeans made it known. With so many thousands of government officials in attendance, it would be easy to overlook these three. Additionally, we see from this that the three Jewish men did not lodge a formal protest; they simply refrained from sharing in the sin of idolatry themselves.

Though their actions were not *public*, neither were they *hidden*. These three Hebrew men must have known they would be discovered, yet they obeyed God rather than man. You will not be able to go through life without being discovered - a lighted candle cannot be hid. There is a feeling among some good people that it will be wise to hide their light under a bushel. They intend to lie low and come out when the rewards are being distributed. They hope to travel to heaven by the back lanes, and go into glory in disguise.

### **Nebuchadnezzar Interviews The Disobedient Hebrew Men (13-15)**

Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said unto them, Is it of purpose, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that ye serve not my god, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? (ASV)

**Is it true, or of purpose?:** To his credit, Nebuchadnezzar did not accept the accusation on hearsay. He made sure of it with a personal interview. This was an even greater test for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. It is one thing to make a stand for God; it is a greater thing to *stick to your stand* when pointedly asked, “**Is it true?**” Peter could follow Jesus after His arrest, but he wilted and denied Jesus when asked, “**Is it true?**”

If standing before the heart-searching God at this time, you cannot say, ‘It is true,’ how should you act? If you cannot say that you take Christ’s cross, and are willing to follow Him at all cost, do not make a profession at all. Do not talk about baptism or the Lord’s Supper, nor of the church, nor of being a Christian; for if you do, you will lie against your own soul. If it is not true that you renounce the world’s idols, do not profess to be his disciple. He that is married to the world, or hard-hearted, had better return to his house, for he is of no service God.

**But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace:** Nebuchadnezzar would not tolerate losing face on such an important occasion. His pride made him declare, “You shall have no other gods than me.”

We can imagine the enormous pressure on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to compromise. Everything in front of them - the king, the furnace, all of it conspired to convince them to compromise. Yet God was more real to them than any of those things. We should not judge the situation by the king’s threat and by the heat of the burning fiery furnace, but by the everlasting God and the eternal life which awaits us. Let us not let the flute, harp, and sackbut fascinate us, but let us hearken to God smiling on us, that we never be moved from serving God.

**Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?** Nebuchadnezzar thinks nothing of insulting *all* gods with this statement. He is more of a *secularist* or a *humanist* than a *theist*. The god he *really* believes in is himself, not the gods of Babylon. Do you recall another king who asked

a question involving Jehovah: “Who is Jehovah that I should obey him?” That was Pharaoh before Moses (Exodus 5:2).

### **The three Hebrew Men Insist They Will Never Worship The Image (16-18)**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (ASV)

**We have no need to answer you:** They had no need to defend themselves. Their guilt in the matter was clear - they clearly would not bow down to this image. **Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us:** In this, the Jewish men show they have a good understanding and appreciation of God’s great power. In fact, they know that God is able to save them from both the burning fiery furnace and from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar himself. **But if not:** In this, the Jewish men show they have a good understanding and appreciation of *submission* to God. They know God’s power, but they also know that they must do what is right even if God does not do what they expect or hope Him to do.

We often whine about our “rights” and what is “fair.” Often it is better to make a stand and take your lumps, leaving your fate in God’s hands. They did not doubt God’s ability but neither did they presume to know God’s will. In this they agreed with Job: “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15). They recognized that God’s plan might be different than their desires. I have my own desires and dreams and I pray that God fulfills them. But if He doesn’t, I can’t turn my back on Him.

Remember that early Christians were not thrown to the lions because they worshiped God, but because they would *not* worship the emperor. In our day, many do love God and think highly of Him - yet they are far from God because they also love and worship the world, sin, and self. “Love not the world neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). **Let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up:** It took great faith to say this. God brought them to this place of great faith by preparing them with tests in less dramatic areas. These men stood firm when challenged to eat impure foods and they saw God bless their obedience. That gave them the courage to obey now, when the stakes were much higher. Are you waiting for something “big” before you really start to obey God? Is your life filled with many small compromises, yet you tell yourself that you will stand firm when it “really” matters? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego show us that “small” things really matter,

The statement of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego is also remarkable for what it does *not* have - any hint of an excuse. In a time of testing like this it is easy to think of a thousand excuses that seem to justify compromise. They might have said, “There is nothing to gain by resisting; wouldn’t we do more good by living?” It is easy to say, “we must live,” but in reality, we all must die - so why not die making a stand for God? They might have said, “We are in a different place; in Rome, do as the Romans do.” Yet they knew that God has unlimited jurisdiction. We must do

more than “perform” acts of religious obedience when we have an audience. They might have said, “We will lose our jobs and our standard of living.” Often when God blesses us we make the blessing an idol and compromise God to keep what we have. They might have said, “After all, we are not being called to renounce our God.” They did not have a super-elastic conscience that said “we are not bowing down to the idol, but in respect for the king, or to the music.” Excuses like this are common but prove the principle that anything will serve as an excuse, when the heart is bent on compromise. They might have said, “Everybody else is doing it.” Instead they cultivated brave personalities, willing to stand alone with God. They might have said, “It is only for once, and not for very long. Ten minutes, just for the king. It is stupid to throw our lives away for ten minutes.” These men knew that ten minutes could change an entire life. Ten minutes can chart the course for your eternity. They might have said, “This is more than can be expected of us; God will understand just this once.” It is true that God understands our struggle with sin - that is why He loves the sinner and made provision at the cross for freedom from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. Knowing that “God understands” should be a spur to obedience, not a license to sin.

### **The Three Men Are Cast Violently Into The Furnace (19-23)**

Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded certain mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their hosen, their tunics, and their mantles, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. (ASV)

**Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury:** No matter how brave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were, this still must have been extremely intimidating. We get the feeling that prior to their statement he spoke kindly, almost in a fatherly manner to these “wayward boys.” After hearing their bold challenge the expression on his face changed!

Despite the intense intimidation, the men stayed courageous in their confession of faith. Spurgeon eloquently described the horror of those who lose their courage at such times: “Remember also that by yielding to the fear of man you are demeaning yourself. There shall come a day when the man that was ashamed of Christ will himself be ashamed: he will wonder where he can hide his guilty head. Look at him! There he is! The traitor who denied his Lord! The Christ was spat upon and nailed to the cross, and this man was afraid to own him. To win the smile of a silly maid, to escape the jest of a coarse fellow, to win a few pieces of silver, to stand respectable among his fellow-men, he turned his back upon his Redeemer and sold his Lord; and now what can be said for him? Who can excuse him? The angels shun him as a man who was ashamed of the Lord of glory. He is clothed with shame and everlasting contempt. Even the lost in hell get away from him, for many of them were more honest than he. Is there such a man as this before me? I summon

him in the name of the living God to answer for his cowardice! Let him come forth and own his crime, and humbly seek forgiveness at the hands of the gracious Savior.” (Spurgeon)

**Bound in their coats . . . the furnace exceedingly hot:** Everything was done to make sure that the three Hebrew men were quickly and completely burned.

### **Nebuchadnezzar Sees Four Alive And Well In The Furnace (24-25)**

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste: and spake and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of the God.

It is astonishing that anyone survived for a moment *inside* the furnace when others perished *at the door*! The Septuagint says in Daniel 3:24 that Nebuchadnezzar’s attention was caught when he heard them singing praises in the furnace. We can imagine that the king had them cast into the furnace and didn’t intend to look twice, believing they would be immediately consumed. As he walks away with a satisfied look on his face, he is immediately stopped by the sound of *singing* coming from the furnace. At a safe distance from the raging heat he peers inside - and sees **four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire**. If this singing in the furnace is true, it reminds us of Paul and Silas singing in the Philippian jail in Acts 16:25 (Carroll 34-35).

**I see four men loose . . . and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God:** Nebuchadnezzar tells us who the fourth was - **the Son of God**. Jesus was literally with them in the worst of their trial. Nebuchadnezzar also observed that the four men were *free* in the fire. The fire only burnt the ropes that bound them.

### **The Hebrew Men Leave The Furnace Unharm (26-27)**

Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace: he spake and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth out of the midst of the fire. And the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power upon their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their hosen changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them. (ASV)

**Servants of the Most High God:** Before they are out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that these men serve the *true* God, the God Most High. **These men on whose bodies the fire had no power:** The trial had no power over these men because they were thoroughly submitted to the power and will of God. Even before the time of Jesus they knew the truth of Jesus’ promise: “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be ye of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). **The smell of fire was not on them:** This demonstrates how complete their deliverance was.

**Aftermath. Nebuchadnezzar Acknowledges The Greatness Of God (28)**

Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. (ASV)

**Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego:** Nebuchadnezzar gives glory to God, but he recognizes that this great God is not *his* God. He is still the God of these three brave men. **Who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him:** In Daniel 3:15 Nebuchadnezzar asked, “who *is* that god that shall deliver you out of my hands?” Now he knows:

- He is the God of the Hebrews (the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego)
- He is the God who sends a Savior.
- He is the God of great power.
- He is the God worthy of trust.
- He is the God worthy of full surrender.
- He is the God who demands exclusive allegiance.

**Nebuchadnezzar now knows a lot about God**

**Yielded their bodies:** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego surrendered themselves *completely* to God - body, soul, and spirit. It was the kind of submission Paul wrote of in Romans 12:1: “...present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” This whole account is a powerful illustration of the principle of Romans 12:1. We see Satan trying to make the believer bow down to his idealized image of what men and women should be. Christians must resist this with everything they have and pursue God’s ideal. In this, we will fulfill Romans 12:2: “And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

**Nebuchadnezzar makes a proclamation (29)**

Nothing evil should be said against the God of the Hebrews.

Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dung-hill: because there is no other god that is able to deliver after this sort. (ASV)

Let us remember Paul expressed the same idea in 2 Corinthians 3:2-3:

Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men; Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stone but in fleshy tables of the heart.

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