

Daniel 3 • A Test Of Faith

Introduction

It seems like some of the greatest stories have been trivialized by the way we reduce them to Bible tales for our children. By doing so we might be missing the far greater and deeper spiritual meanings of such powerful lessons as Noah's Ark, David and Goliath, Daniel in the Lion's Den, and of course this one with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. As with all signs, wonders, and miracles, it is the greater spiritual message behind them that is of the most benefit. When Christ died it was not the sign of the curtain being torn that covered the entrance to the Holy of Holies that was as significant as the fact that it represented a greater teaching of what the work of the cross accomplished. Yes, God performs a miracle here, but there is a much greater message behind each and every action going on. And it is not just a challenge to the faith of three lone men, but to the heart of every person not just witnessing this event, but ultimately to every person on the known planet at that time.

¹Nebuchadnezzar 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. ²Then 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. ³Then 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.

⁴Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, ⁵that 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. ⁶But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

⁷Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

[Read v.1-7]

Note: Translating the dimensions of the image we would understand it to be approximately 90 feet tall by 9 feet wide.

Q: What might be ironic about Nebuchadnezzar setting up an image to himself considering his public confession in the last chapter?

A: When God revealed the content and meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream through Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar paid homage to Daniel and stated, "Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings". (Dan. 2:46-47) He seemed to acknowledge the sovereignty of the One True God.

Q: So why might it NOT be surprising that Nebuchadnezzar went ahead and set up an image to himself considering what happened in the last chapter?

A: Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God as Daniel's God ("your God") but made no confession of faith that he now actually worshiped and followed God. In fact, since the golden head of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream was stated to represent Nebuchadnezzar himself, this most likely shows that he has come to the erroneous conclusion that he is, indeed, someone of such great standing that he is to be worshiped.

Q: What might be significant about the place the image was set up, "on the plain of Dura"?

A: Many scholars believe this to be the same place where they tried to build the Tower of Babel.

Point: It is important to note the role of Babylon throughout Scripture. It is the first place where man attempted to unite the world under a single government and replace God with himself in Genesis with the Tower of Babel, but occurs yet again with the literal historical Babylon and is recapitulated in the Last Days as described again in Revelation 17-18. Babylon always stands for rebellion against the Lord and an attempted substitute for what the Lord provides. In Genesis 11 we see Babel in rebellion against God in a human attempt at worldwide unity both politically and spiritually. This occurs again under Nebuchadnezzar and the establishment of his image. And it is the exact same thing attempted by the final person of the Antichrist in the Last Days when the material, cultural, and religious systems of the world are united under one world federation. "Babel" literally means "gate of God", so every version of Babylon is a counterfeit that pretends to be the way to heaven when in truth it is the way to hell.

Q: Why should the fact that the dimensions of the image “was sixty cubits and its width 6 cubits” grab our attention?

A: If we were to read this in the original Aramaic we would clearly see these dimensions articulated as “666”.

Q: What other very strong parallel to the Antichrist is presented here?

A: Every type of Antichrist emulates the final person of the Antichrist in their desire to be worshiped in God’s place.

Q: What might be significant about the people the king first assembles to provide instructions concerning the worship of the image?

A: They are all political leaders. It is yet another parallel to the working of the Antichrist to form a single, worldwide government with the purpose of not just being the political head, but the spiritual focus.

Q: What might be ironic about the proclamation that anyone not worshipping the image will be “cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire”?

A: This is actually the reality for those who refuse to worship the One True God who will ultimately be thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:15) In every way possible Satan attempts to counterfeit the true things of God.

Application: This represents the way the human heart operates when God is not properly honored in that man glorifies himself and tries to make everybody else worship him. The ultimate expression of this is in the Antichrist.

⁸For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. ⁹They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: “O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. ¹²There 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.”

[Read v.8-12]

Q: Why are the charges brought against these three particular men?

A: Because they are not merely Jews, but “*certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon*”. (v.12)

Q: What is significant about the names of these men?

A: Hananiah (which means “the Lord is gracious”) was renamed Shadrach by the Babylonians which means “command of the moon-god Aku”. Mishael (which means “who is like God?”) was renamed Meshach which means “who is like the moon-god Aku?” And Azariah (which means “the Lord is my helper”) was renamed Abed-nego which means “servant of Nebo”. In other words, the Babylonians’ intent from the very beginning to submit them to their false gods is evidenced by the way the renamed the three men to something similar to their original Hebrew names but transposing them to an association with false Babylonian gods. This was always their primary agenda.

Q: What is significant about the way they characterized the charges against the men to the king?

A: Everything they charge is actually the truth. The men are clear witnesses to the fact that they do not and will not worship any god but their own.

Application: Believers may face a time where the whole world worships contrary to what a small, faithful remnant know to be true.

¹³Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.

¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar 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? ¹⁵Now 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?”

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷If 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. ¹⁸But 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.”

[Read v.13-18]

Q: Is the response of the three men biblical?

A: While Romans 13 instructs believers to obey their rulers and laws, Acts 4:19 and Acts 5:29 make it clear that one can never obey a government at the expense of obedience to Christ. Governments and rulers are never allowed to control our conscience or tell us how to worship.

Q: But what is the big deal about “worship”? Can’t you just utter words to make someone happy even though you don’t believe them in your heart?

A: The biblical concept of “worship” means to “to serve”. What is being required here is to stop serving the One True God and begin serving the false one in His place. This is a battle for the heart.

Q: So how might we characterize their response rejecting the pressure to cease serving the True God to serve another in His place?

A: As theologians from old have put it: they would rather burn than turn.

Q: Why might the three men have recognized that there is a very serious spiritual issue at stake here beyond just the persecution of their own faith?

A: In v.15 the king makes the statement, “What god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?” They probably recognized that not only was Nebuchadnezzar an unbeliever in spite of everything that happened previously with Daniel, but had elevated himself to the level of godhood in claiming there were no gods more powerful than him. This was not just a challenge to the men’s personal faith, it was a challenge against the entire faith in the Lord God Almighty Himself.

Q: Since this is actually an issue about the sovereignty of God Himself, what might we have expected in their response which is missing?

A: Having perceived the depth of deception Nebuchadnezzar was given over to, they did not respond with a theological debate nor any kind of intellectual argument. The issue really comes down to a matter of faith and therefore the only appropriate response in such situations is faith.

Application: Do we realize that not everything requires an intellectual response? How well do we recognize the times when what is most needed is a statement and display of faith in action?

Q: Was their assertion that God could deliver them from the fire just a grand gesture? Or just theoretical? How could they substantiate such an option as actually occurring in reality?

A: They had the assurance of what God had already done in the past such as the crossing of the Red Sea, the many times He saved Israel supernaturally, and so forth. They knew from past precedent that God could choose to overcome any earthly situation. And, of course, they have the example of Job.

Q: But what is the ultimate expression and testimony of their faith?

A: “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.” (v.18) Regardless of what happens they will serve no other.

“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.

— Job 13:15a

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Q: What is the biblical stance when it comes to persecution and what Christians should expect?

A: They should expect that persecution is inevitable.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

— 1 Peter 4:12–14

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

— John 15:18–20

Application: One aspect of persecution is having to make a public stand against sin; another is making that same stand for serving Christ and no other. It is not just a test of our personal faith, but the entire Christian faith which is tested in the public view. How might this conflict with today’s pressure for Christians to stand up for political causes? Are they truly a stand against sin or for Christ’s name?

[Read v.19-25]

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰He 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. ²¹Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. ²²For this reason, because the king’s command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. ²³But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.

²⁴Then 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.”

²⁵He said, “Look! I see four men loosed

Q: Why should Nebuchadnezzar’s response be no surprise to us?

A: It was a personal issue for him. Because he had deified himself there was no way their response could be taken except as a personal expression of what they thought about him.

Point: This might help us to understand why Satan so persistently goes after both Jews and Christians, because it is not just about the two groups who believe in the One True God, but the two groups who reject the person of Satan and his repeated iterations in the many Antichrists in every age and the final one to come. It is a personal thing with him.

Q: But what did God do with Nebuchadnezzar’s rage?

A: He turned it around as a personal testimony to Nebuchadnezzar since God would rescue the men not from the ordinary means of punishment, but one seven times greater than usual at the personal command of the king.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

— Romans 8:28

Q: What might be significant about Nebuchadnezzar commanding his best soldiers to carry out this punishment as well as what happened to them in the process?

A: We have yet another parallel response from God in what happens to the best of the king of the earth versus the best of the King of Heaven. It

and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!”

is a striking example of the ultimate end for the unsaved versus the saved and the fate of those who choose to serve the King of Heaven versus the king of earth.

Q: Why would specific mention of throwing them in so fully clothed be important?

A: From the earthly point of view this is done to add to the torment of the victims as their clothing first catches fire; from the heavenly point of view it provides yet another visible proof of God’s working when that clothing is not only unsigned, but doesn’t even smell of smoke. What man devises for evil, God turns around for His glory.

Q: What is the greater significance of the fourth man witnessed in the fire with the three men?

A: Christ never ever leaves us. Even in the midst of the worst fiery trial He is always right there beside us.

*“When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.
— Isaiah 43:2*

Point: Everything that the earthly king does as a counterfeit in this event has a true, opposing action provided by the Heavenly King. Nebuchadnezzar’s best is matched against God’s best; Nebuchadnezzar presents his false image but God provides the actual person of Christ before everyone’s eyes; Nebuchadnezzar institutes false worship but God demonstrates through the three men the meaning of true worship. As with most things it comes down to a test of faith for everyone involved.

Application: The way we face persecution has as much to do with testing our personal faith as it does with placing our faith on display as a testimony to others, especially the ones persecuting us. It is in God’s hands how He will use the circumstances not just to carry out His will, but to reverse Satan’s intentions for an entirely different outcome.

²⁶Then 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.

²⁷The 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.

²⁸Nebuchadnezzar 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

[Read v.26-30]

Q: What was God’s basic process for the three men?

A: First the suffering, then the glory.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed...After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

— 1 Peter 5:1, 10

Application: Contrast this with the many and varied false teachings that Christians should never suffer and are entitled to rewards in this present life.

Q: How might we characterize the ultimate state of these three men?

A: They were actually better off for having gone through the fire because...

command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore 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.”

³⁰Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

1. They had the opportunity to walk with Christ and suffer together with Him.
2. It reaffirmed their faith knowing how near Christ is regardless of the danger or trial.
3. The fire actually set them free of their bonds in much the same way that suffering for Christ results in liberty from sin and the world.
4. They were a public testimony which glorified God before others.
5. And finally, the king not only promoted them and gave them honors, but did the same for the One True God they served.
6. Other benefits?

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

— 1 Corinthians 6:19–20

Q: What might be very powerful about Nebuchadnezzar’s admiration in v.28 for having “put their trust in Him, violating the king’s command”?

A: It is the ultimate triumph of the King of Heaven’s Word over the earthly king’s word.

Q: What is the greater significance of Nebuchadnezzar’s testimony in v.29 that “there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way”?

A: It is not just pertinent to the event that took place on that day, but is actually a greater testimony about the end of all things, and that Christ is the only one who can deliver from the inevitable future fire of hell.

Application: *A test of faith for a believer confirms what is already inside them; for the non-believer it is the revelation of the true character of God. The unsaved for the first time gain salvation; upon the saved are heaped even greater rewards for faithfulness.*

Epilogue: The Prophetic Lesson

Did you notice that although this event is recorded in the book of Daniel that Daniel himself is completely absent from the account? He is thought to be away on official business for a prolonged time during which the king, taking advantage of that absence, erects the image and institutes false worship. There are many who believe this illustrates the Rapture of the church and how when the church is out of the world, Satan pursues his plan to enslave the minds and bodies of all mankind.

2 Thessalonians 2 and Revelation 13 make it clear that Satan will have a kind of “heyday” after the church is removed. He will raise up his world ruler and establish both a totalitarian government and a one-world religion in the character of Babylon. Just as these three men were a remnant to God, so the 144,000 sealed by the Lord and protected from Satan’s devices will be a testimony and remnant for Him. (Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5)

The Antichrist will set up his own image and force the world to worship it, (Rev. 13) but the faithful remnant will not bow down. Satan will pursue and persecute them with a personal vengeance unlike anything seen before. Therefore Daniel 3 may be a prophetic foreshadowing of Israel during the Tribulation.

But before the return of Christ, Christians may have to go through the “furnace of fire”. There is no need to fear for Christ will never leave us and, in fact, it is far better to go through the furnace of fire than to end up in the lake of fire.