

Power and Pride – A Dangerous Mixture

Daniel 3:1-30

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

Nebuchadnezzar's Power is Recognized (Daniel 3:1-7)

1. "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" (Daniel 3:1)
 - The construction of this "**image of gold**" would have occurred sometime after the events recorded in Daniel chapter 2 since (as we will see) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were all three placed in a position of authority (Dan. 3:12) within the Babylonian Empire just as they were appointed to do. (Daniel 2:49)
 - 1) The **character** of Nebuchadnezzar is shown here in the fact that rather than continuing to acknowledge God as the "**God of gods and Lord of kings**" as recorded in Daniel 2:47, he instead erects an image in his (Nebuchadnezzar's) honor and will demand everyone (including the Jews) to worship it.
 - 2) Nebuchadnezzar (like many of the pagan kings of his day) was an **ego maniac** and this image was created to unify and consolidate his power as well as to bring attention to him and his accomplishments; thus causing all people in his kingdom to worship him.
 - 3) Nebuchadnezzar will be judged for his actions that are recorded in Daniel chapter 3 as we will see in Daniel chapter 4:24-33.

- The image itself was **large** and **magnificent**
 - 1) **90** feet high – the equivalent of a modern day 8 story building
 - 2) It was pretty narrow in width - only **9** feet, causing most scholars to conclude that it was placed on some sort of large pedestal.
 - 3) This image may well have been inspired by Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream.
 - The location of the image was on the "**plain of Dura**"
 - 1) "**Dura**" was a common name in Mesopotamia that described a place enclosed by a mountain or wall so it may or may not have been a specific province.
 - 2) Archeologists have uncovered a large square made of brick about six miles southeast of Babylon that is concluded to possibly be the base for this image.
 - 3) It would make complete sense since that the statue would probably have been located in close proximity to Babylon as this was the central point where the king would gather his leaders and officials together.
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 had set up. 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 had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up" (Daniel 3:2-3)
- The king gathered **8** significant groups/classes of officials (mentioned twice in these two verses) to this special dedication of the image.
 - These groups of "officials" are all who served in any official capacity in the govt.
 - Such a gathering of officials at this special dedication was no doubt an **impressive** sight and probably intended to feed Nebuchadnezzar's ego.

3. “Then the herald loudly proclaimed: to you the command is given, O peoples, nations, and men of every language, 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 kings had set up” (Dan 3:4-5)

- There were two significant requirements of all the people of Babylon:
 - 1) They were to “fall down” before the image which was a public display of complete submission and dedication to the king. They were in essence swearing allegiance to the king.
 - 2) They were to “worship” the image which in essence (since it represented the king) was the same as worshipping the king himself.
- The mark that would trigger the worship of this image was the sound of specific instruments (horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, etc.) that when put together created a unique sound that let everyone know it was time to begin.

4. “But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire” (Daniel 3:6)

- The requirement to “fall down and worship” applied to all subjects of the empire
- The penalty for failing to comply with this command resulted in a severe punishment which under normal circumstances would bring **sudden death**.

5. “Therefore 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 worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up” (Daniel 3:7)

- It would appear that based on this statement that the officials and all people of the kingdom recognized the authority of King Nebuchadnezzar and willingly submitted to his authority by bowing down and worshipping the image.
- What we will learn from the next passage of Scripture is that at least “**certain Jews**” (i.e. *Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego*) refuse to comply with this order.

Nebuchadnezzar's Power is Resisted (Daniel 3:8-18)

1. "For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: O king, live forever! You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a blazing fire" (Daniel 3:8-11)
 - There was a group (certain Chaldeans) that brought **charges/accusations** against the Jews because they **refused** to "fall down and worship the golden image".
 - 1) These Chaldeans (court officials, magicians, astrologers etc.) who brought these accusations may have been driven by **anger** and perhaps even **jealousy** against the Jews.
 - 2) These Chaldeans continued to feed the ego of Nebuchadnezzar by reminding him of his decree and the results if anyone fails to obey.
 - The worship of any image was against the **Mosaic Law** (Exodus 20:3-5) and something that a follower of the One True God would not participate in.
2. "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" (Daniel 3:12)
 - The Chaldeans actually identify **three** individuals as violators of the king's command perhaps with the hopes of gaining some sort of favor with the king.
 - The accusations against them are:
 - 1) They have **disregarded** (disobeyed) the king
 - 2) They do not **serve** the gods of Babylon
 - 3) They **refuse** to worship the golden image that the king had created

3. “Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; then these men were brought before the king. 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? (Daniel 3:13-14)
- The fact that Nebuchadnezzar responds in “**rage and anger**” to what the Chaldeans had told him about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego tells us a few things:
 - 1) Nebuchadnezzar was not a genuine **follower** of the Lord because if he had been he never would have created such an image to be worshipped and he would not have required the continued worship of the false gods of Babylon.
 - 2) Nebuchadnezzar was a **prideful** man with a big **ego**
 - 3) Nebuchadnezzar had no **loyalty** to his subordinates no matter how highly he esteemed them.
 - Daniel’s name is **absent** from this list but there is no doubt he would not have participated in worshipping the image either:
 - 1) Some conclude that Daniel may have been in a **different** part of the empire conducting other duties.
 - 2) Others conclude that Daniel was present and would also have refused to worship the image, however because of his **favor** with the king; he was simply in too high of a position for the Chaldeans to risk such an accusation.
 - The king seems to give the three men (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego) the **benefit of the doubt** and asks them if these accusations against them are true:
 - 1) It is possible that the king recognized the motivation of **jealousy** behind the accusations by the Chaldeans since the king had promoted these Jews to such a high position within the government.
 - 2) It is also possible that the king was trying to give these young lads the benefit of the doubt and provide a second chance since they did find favor with the king in helping to bring the interpretation of his earlier dream.

4. “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” (Daniel 3:15)
- The king provides another opportunity for Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to submit to the king by falling down and worshipping the image.
 - 1) One way to look at this is that the king really **respected** these young men and was trying his best to create an opportunity for them to comply.
 - 2) Another possibility is the king didn't **believe** the Chaldeans and he was giving these young lads a chance to prove these officials to be liars.
 - The king once again remind them of the consequences of failing to submit:
 - 1) They would be **cast** into the furnace of blazing fire
 - 2) He makes it clear that not even the gods would be capable of **saving** them from the king's wrath.
5. “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego replied to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 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. 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” (Daniel 3:16-18)
- It was very clear to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego that the Lord was more than capable of **delivering** them from the wrath of the king and even the furnace of blazing fire - **and if it was His will to do so then He would.**
 - No matter what the outcome or results of the king's wrath; Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego made it clear they would **not** fall down and worship the golden image.

Nebuchadnezzar's Pride is Revealed (Daniel 3:19-27)

1. "Then 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. He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in order to cast them in the furnace of blazing fire" (Daniel 3:19-20)
 - The response by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego was not what Nebuchadnezzar wanted to hear and it sent the king in to a complete **rage**.
 - 1) We are told that the king was filled with **wrath** toward these men
 - 2) He became visibly upset and it showed **outwardly** in his facial expression
 - Instead of a slow torture over a low flame, the king ordered a "**quick death**" by requiring the furnace of fire to be heated seven times hotter than normal.
 - Based on the angered response by Nebuchadnezzar, he was making a public statement of what would happen if anyone else rebelled against his authority.
2. "Then 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. For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flames of fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach Meshach and Abed-Nego. But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell into the midst of the blazing fire still tied up" (Daniel 3:22-23)
 - It is not clear why their clothing was left on as the custom for this type of punishment was to remove the clothing but perhaps because there was a sense of urgency to fulfill the order by the king.
 - The furnace probably had a large opening at the top through which the men were lowered and because of the haste involved in getting Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego into the furnace, the ones who lowered them in were burned and killed by the flames as the three young lads dropped into the furnace still fully clothed.

3. “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? The replied to the king, certainly, O king. 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**” (Daniel 3:24-25)

- Using this type of punishment (burning people alive) was a common form of capital **punishment** for the Babylonian kings.
- The furnace was pretty **large** as it accommodated not just three men but we are told here that the king saw four men and all four were walking about in the midst of the fire completely unharmed.
- Nebuchadnezzar identifies the fourth person as one “**like the son of the gods**”.
 - 1) Nebuchadnezzar was not a **follower** of the Lord so he probably just recognized this person as a “**supernatural being**”.
 - 2) Although we are not given the identity of the fourth person – most scholars conclude this to be a **preincarnate** (before the incarnation or birth of Jesus) appearance of Christ - much like several other appearances of the Angel of the Lord that are found in the Old Testament. (Genesis 16:7-16, Gen. 22:11-12)

4. “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. 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 on their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them” (Daniel 3:26-27)

- Nebuchadnezzar tells the three young lads to come out of the furnace and even acknowledges them to be **servants** of the “**Most High God**”.
- Everyone stood in amazement since they were unharmed and none of them had even the smell of smoke on their clothes – a true **miracle** of God.

Nebuchadnezzar's Pride is Renounced (Daniel 3:28-30)

1. "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 yielding up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God." (Daniel 3:28)
 - This response by Nebuchadnezzar follows his acknowledgement that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego is the **Most High God**.
 - 1) This **admission** by Nebuchadnezzar is significant in that up to this point he would have been of the opinion that the Babylonian gods were superior to the God of the Jews.
 - 2) It is worth noting that although this admission on the surface appears to be a reverent acceptance of the Lord's power and authority – it lacks an acknowledgement that the Lord is **his** God. In other words, like so many other people who embrace the idea of One All-Powerful God – they fail to fully and faithfully **submit** to Him.
 - It is interesting to note that the same Nebuchadnezzar who had no problem putting these young men's lives in danger is quick to respond with such an **affirmation** of the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego.
 - 1) Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the "**angel**" whom the Lord sent to **deliver** these young men – another affirmation of the "**fourth**" person that he saw in the furnace that most scholars conclude to be a preincarnate appearance of the **Lord Jesus Christ**.
 - 2) Nebuchadnezzar also acknowledges the fact that these young men put their complete **trust** in the Lord even at the risk of losing their lives.
 - This is a great testimony to the fact that any follower of the Lord needs to take serious the commitment to be **submissive** to His will and **obedient** to His commands.

2. “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.” (Daniel 3:29)
- What was the motivation by Nebuchadnezzar to make this decree?
 - 1) One possible answer is that he wanted to put the Chaldeans on notice that these 3 young lads were off limits to any further **accusation** and any attempt to interfere with them of their God was to be met with severe **punishment**.
 - 2) Another possible answer is that Nebuchadnezzar had a genuine **fear** of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego and perhaps he realized that he had pushed things as far as he could.
 - 3) There is nothing that evidences itself here that Nebuchadnezzar **submitted** to the Lord and willingly chose to follow Him in the manner in which the Lord would require.
 - What is evidenced here is that Nebuchadnezzar makes a clear admission that the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego is **superior** to any other god! This is something of course that a follower of the One True God would know to be a **fact** and without question!
3. “Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego to prosper in the province of Babylon” (Daniel 3:30)
- This opportunity to prosper was somewhat of a gift by Nebuchadnezzar but it really was a provision and blessing of the Lord that may well have been the result of the **faithfulness** of these three young men.
 - For the balance of the Book of Daniel, we no longer hear about these three young lads and can only assume that they continued their lives of **faith** in a community of Gentiles and no doubt were a positive **influence** of those around them.