

## Faith That Gets You Through the Fire

Series: The Book of Daniel

Daniel 3

June 27, 2021

Welcome again to worship. I'm so glad we are together today.

We are continuing our series in the Book of Daniel. We are seeing how stories from so long ago are relevant for us today as we face an ever increasingly evil world.

Today, we are looking at the first of two of the most famous stories in the Book of Daniel: the fiery furnace. I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin, or if you are online, open your spiritual notebook to take notes. We will be looking at Daniel 3, starting with the first 7 verses:

*King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet tall and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then he sent messages to the high officers, officials, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up. So all these officials came and stood before the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then a herald shouted out, "People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king's command! When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue. Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." So at the sound of the musical instruments, all the people, whatever their race or nation or language, bowed to the ground and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.<sup>1</sup>*

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, says Daniel 3 took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, somewhere between 587–586 BC. This is the time when he destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and deported, for a third time, Jews to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar paid homage and praise to Daniel's God at the end of chapter 2, but it was a shallow and surface praise that would not last long. In fact, these verses suggest that Nebuchadnezzar did not accept God's will that he was only the head of gold and a temporary king. He wanted it all; therefore, he set up a great gold statue 90 feet high by 9 feet wide, gold plated from head to toe. Our text goes to great lengths to note the idolatrous nature of this statue of gold. The word "statue" occurs more than ten times in the chapter. Whether this is an image to a particular god (possibly Marduk or Nabu) or an image to Nebuchadnezzar we cannot say. It probably involved both!<sup>2</sup>

Here is our first point of the day: **God's People Will Be Confronted with the Idols of This World.**

Now, today, we might think, "What idols?" It's not like we have a Germantown shrine to Baal or Buddha or Marduk or Nabu. In America, we are too sophisticated for such nonsense. No, we have other gods we worship.

- We worship celebrity: we worship the rich and the famous. We watch their shows, read their articles, buy their products. If you follow Fox News online, maybe you are like me. I am tired of stories of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle or Lori Loughlin.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel 3:1-7 (NLT2)

<sup>2</sup> Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Daniel 3:1

- We worship money: We worship money. There is no doubt about that. I wonder if you saw this: A couple of days ago, televangelist Jim Bakker settled a lawsuit with the State of Missouri over his marketing of a fake cure for the coronavirus. He will pay \$156,000 in fines.
- We worship things: Cars, clothes, airplanes.
- One of the newer ones we worship is social media. Don't believe me. How much do you think people are looking at social media? According to an article, the average user spent 2 ½ hours per day on social media in 2020. 50.1% of the time spent on mobile was done using social media apps in 2020. Facebook is the most popular, costing people an average of over 2 hours each day.<sup>3</sup> And if you think, "I don't worship Facebook and social media," then let me ask you, "Are you spending more time on Facebook than you do reading your Bible or praying?" If so, you are worshipping social media.

We are being confronted with the idols of today. They are all around us.

Second, **God's People Will Be Criticized by the People of This World.**

Let's look at verses 8-12:

*But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Long live the king! You issued a decree requiring all the people to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments. That decree also states that those who refuse to obey must be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up."*<sup>4</sup>

Honoring and obeying God are not always popular. Sometimes they get us into serious problems and even life-threatening situations. While the latter may not often be the experience of Christians in America, it is a daily reality for many of our brothers and sisters around the world. For example, in Mozambique, violent Islamic jihadist groups like Boko Haram and al Qaeda are targeting Christians, including children as young as 12 years old being beheaded. Simply trying to live a life that is faithful to the God and Savior they love leads them to be criticized, ostracized, and hated. Still, with the apostle Peter they will declare by words and actions, "We must obey God rather than people."<sup>5</sup>

Third, **God's People Will Be Challenged to Worship the Gods of This World.**

Let's look at verses 13-15:

*Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "How Much Time Do People Spend on Social Media in 2021?", <https://techjury.net/blog/time-spent-on-social-media/#gref>, March 29, 2021

<sup>4</sup> Daniel 3:8-12 (NLT2)

<sup>5</sup> Acts 5:29

<sup>6</sup> Daniel 3:13-15 (NLT2)

It takes courage not to compromise, and your mind needs to be made up before the pressure comes. If you wait until “the moment of truth,” you may find out it is too late.

Nebuchadnezzar set up an image made of gold to glorify himself and unify his kingdom. Everything was moving along nicely until three Jews refused to go along to get along. To say that the head of the Babylonian government was unimpressed by their religious convictions is an understatement. Nebuchadnezzar was “in furious rage.” The three Jews had resisted the herd mentality and bravely stood alone. Apparently, Daniel was not present, for there is no doubt he would have stood with them. Nebuchadnezzar commanded that they be brought before him and he questioned them. But before moving to their execution, he gave them a second chance. Maybe he suspected they had been accused by jealous rivals. Perhaps he genuinely liked them and was looking to provide a way out of this political mess. If they would simply repent of disobeying the king, bow down, and worship his idol, all would be well and good. But if they did not, they would be immediately put to death by being burned alive in the fiery furnace. The options are clear and plain.

In providing them a second chance, Nebuchadnezzar asked the question that is the key to the entire episode: “What god will be able to rescue you from my power?” The three Jews were glad he asked, and this brings us to our 4<sup>th</sup> point:

**God’s People Must Be Courageous in the Face of Danger in This World.**

Verses 16-18:

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”*<sup>7</sup>

Wow. What a testimony. What a confession. Three things are clear. First, God’s servants will bow down only to God and no one else. Second, God’s servants will trust in God’s sovereign purposes no matter what. Third, God’s servants will trust in God’s power and protection and leave what happens to his providential plan.<sup>8</sup>

This is very similar to what Jesus said 600 years later:

*When these things begin to happen, watch out! You will be handed over to the local councils and beaten in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. For the Good News must first be preached to all nations. But when you are arrested and stand trial, don’t worry in advance about what to say. Just say what God tells you at that time, for it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*<sup>9</sup>

We must be courageous in the face of danger in this world.

**Finally, God’s People Can Be Confident the Lord Is with Them No Matter What Happens in This World.**

Here’s the coolest part of the story, verses 19-30:

*Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven*

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel 3:16-18 (NLT2)

<sup>8</sup> Christ-Centered Exposition - Exalting Jesus in Daniel 3:16-18

<sup>9</sup> Mark 13:9-11 (NLT2)

*times hotter than usual. Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So they tied them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames. But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?" "Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied. "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!" Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn't even smell of smoke! Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!" Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.<sup>10</sup>*

In Philippians 1:21, Paul writes, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."<sup>11</sup> Pastor John Piper calls this the ultimate win-win scenario. If I live, I get Christ. If I die, I get more of Christ! Either way I win! This way of thinking of life as walking with God and death as ushering one into God's presence must have been in the minds of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

As we watch their story unfold in Daniel 3, which is the last time we will see these men in this book, we will see men of courage, conviction, and commitment. These are men sold out to God. It is popular to talk of those who show what we call courage under fire. In this passage we will see three men who demonstrate courage *in* the fire! Their faith is amazing. Their confidence in God is stellar.

My friends, because of the presence of God with us and Christ's work for us, believers can have courage to resist false gods and testify to the one true God.

A grandfather found his grandson, jumping up and down in his playpen, crying at the top of his voice. When Johnnie saw his grandfather, he reached up his little chubby hands and said, "Out, Gramp, out."

It was only natural for Grandfather to reach down to lift the little fellow out of his predicament; but as he did, the mother of the child stepped up and said, "No, Johnnie, you are being punished, so you must stay in."

The grandfather was at a loss to know what to do. The child's tears and chubby hands reached deep into his heart, but the mother's firmness in correcting her son for

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel 3:19-30 (NLT2)

<sup>11</sup> Philippians 1:21 (NIV)

misbehavior must not be lightly taken. Here was a problem of love versus law, but love found a way. The grandfather could not take the youngster out of the playpen, so he crawled in with him.

God did not keep the three Hebrew children out of the fiery furnace, but He went into the furnace with them.

God will not always deliver us from trouble and heartache, but He has promised grace for every situation of life.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fred W. Parsons, *These Times*, March 1969, downloaded from [www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com)