

Daniel Study | Week 2

Daniel 3: The Clash of Kingdoms

The Big Picture

Daniel 3 continues the story of God's people living under Babylonian rule. Nebuchadnezzar's demand for worship brings the conflict between earthly power and God's authority into the open.

The chapter asks a central question: **Who is worthy of our worship?**

Recap Daniel 1 & 2

Read Daniel 1–2

- In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.
- The chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.
- Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food.
- Nebuchadnezzar uses a systematic process of cultural assimilation to re-educate captive Judean youths, attempting to replace their Hebrew heritage and faith with the language, wisdom, and religion of Babylon.
- The Babylonians tried to strip them of their identity as worshipers of the one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

Recap Daniel 1 & 2

- In every matter of wisdom and understanding, the king found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.
- Nebuchadnezzar has a troubling dream, requests that someone interpret the dream or die, Daniel gathers the prayer team, goes before God in prayer and interprets the dream.

The Statue's Four Earthly Kingdoms

1. Head of gold: Representing the Babylonian Empire (specifically King Nebuchadnezzar).
2. Chest and arms of silver: Representing the second kingdom to follow.
3. Belly and thighs of bronze: Representing a third kingdom that will rule over the earth.
4. Legs of iron and feet of mixed iron and clay: Representing a fourth strong and divided kingdom.

The Fifth Kingdom — A crushing stone / mountain: A final, everlasting kingdom established by God that destroys the previous four kingdoms and fills the whole earth.

Daniel 2:44 — in the days of those kings (the kings of iron and clay) the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.

Daniel gets promoted to the king's court.

“Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.” — Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 3

The Clash of Kingdoms

Read Daniel 3:1–7

Daniel 3:1 — King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

- 60 cubits high
- 6 cubits wide
- Followed by a massive public dedication ceremony.
- The dimensions are roughly 90 feet high and 9 feet wide, depending upon the cubit measurement used.

The Public Demand for Worship

Daniel 3:2–7

Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. They gathered and stood before the image.

The herald proclaimed aloud: “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.”

“And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.”

Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Why make the golden image?

- God creates and Satan counterfeits.
- Counterfeit king, Nebuchadnezzar out of pride and arrogance builds a counterfeit (god) idol to throw a counterfeit worship service.
- Nebuchadnezzar is demanding more than political loyalty. He wants worship.

Why is this a problem for the Hebrew?

Exodus 20:3–5 — “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.”

What we are seeing here is a counterfeit worship service.

Psalm 150

*1 Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!
2 Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!
3 Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!
4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe!
5 Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*

What we are seeing here is a counterfeit worship service.

The real battle is worship. Who or what do you treasure above all?

When Faithfulness Becomes Visible

An idol doesn't have to be made of gold.

An idol can be: success, money, reputation, politics, relationships, sexuality, comfort, career, children, popularity, control or security.

The question is not merely: “Do I have an idol?”

The better question is: “What am I unwilling to lose because I value it more than obedience to God?”

Daniel 3:8–12

Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar that the three Jews whom he had appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon would not serve his gods or worship the golden image.

What is the accusation against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

- “These men will not worship your gods.”
- Their faithfulness has become visible.
- There comes a moment when following Christ requires a decision that other people can see.
- Jesus said: Matthew 10:32–33 — “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father...”
- Faith in Christ is not merely a private belief.
- The three Hebrews don't insult Nebuchadnezzar. They don't organize a rebellion. They don't attack the Babylonians. They simply refuse to worship what is false.

Daniel 3:13–15

Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. He offered them another opportunity to bow down and worship, but warned them again of the fiery furnace.

“And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

Nebuchadnezzar gives them another opportunity.

- Nebuchadnezzar shows his arrogance in this question.
- “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”
- Nebuchadnezzar thinks he has absolute authority.
- Earthly authority is always limited by God's sovereignty.
- Nebuchadnezzar can control their circumstances. He cannot control their worship.
- He can threaten their bodies. He cannot own their souls.
- Jesus said: Matthew 10:28 — do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Statement of Faith

Daniel 3:16–18

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

“Our God is able”

- This is mature and unwavering faith on display.
- In any situation or trial real faith trusts God with the outcome.

Romans 8:28 — “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”

- Let’s display our God is able faith. Have faith for the good in Romans 8:28.
- Our God is able but if He doesn’t He is still worthy of worship and praise.
- God is able to deliver you, bless you, heal you but if He doesn’t, He is still the only one worthy of your worship.

Into the Fire

Daniel 3:19–23

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.

The three men were bound and thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king’s order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed the men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

This was a genuine and deadly threat.

- The text isn’t describing three men standing beside a campfire, they were thrown into an execution furnace. The counterfeit hell.
- Their obedience didn’t prevent them from entering the fire.
- Sometimes obedience and righteousness requires that we walk into the furnace.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn’t get out of the situation by compromising. They obeyed God’s command from Exodus 20:3–4—and went into the fire.

God Does Not Always Keep Us FROM the Fire

- The Bible repeatedly shows God's people going through suffering:
- Noah went through the flood. Israel went through the Red Sea.
- David went through the valley. Daniel went through exile.
- The three Hebrews went through the furnace. Jesus went through the cross.
- Paul went through persecution.
- The Christian promise is not: “You will never suffer.”
- The Christian promise is: “God will never abandon you.”

Psalm 23:4 says: “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

God is with us through it all.

The Fourth Man

Daniel 3:24–25

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

He answered, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.”

The Aramaic expression can be understood as “a son of the gods” or “a divine being.” Nebuchadnezzar is speaking from his pagan worldview.

Daniel 3 itself does not explicitly say, “This is Jesus.” But many theologians would argue that this is a Christophany which refers to pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus.

I personally believe this is a pre-incarnate appearance of our Savior.

Whatever your personal belief, the presence of the living God is in the flames with them.

They Were Not Alone

- God did not merely change the circumstances. God entered the circumstances with them.
- They went into the furnace bound. They walked around unbound.
- They entered threatened with death. They emerged alive.
- The fire destroyed their bonds but did not destroy them.
- That gives us a tremendous picture of God's work.
- Sometimes God doesn't remove the trial.
- He uses the trial to remove the things that bind us.

The Fire Didn't Destroy Them

Daniel 3:26–30

Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace and called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, to come out.

They came out from the fire. The satraps, prefects, governors, and counselors saw that the fire had not had any power over their bodies. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

The text emphasizes: no injury, no singed hair, clothing unharmed, no smell of fire.

- God didn't merely keep them alive.
- God demonstrated His complete authority over the thing that was supposed to destroy them.

Nebuchadnezzar Recognizes God's Power

Nebuchadnezzar blessed the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who had sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

Nebuchadnezzar declared that there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way, and he promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes God's power. This is not repentance, it's temporary recognition.

God's power has been publicly demonstrated, and Nebuchadnezzar is forced to acknowledge it.

Six Lessons From Daniel 3

1. Faithfulness doesn't require certainty about the outcome.

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't know what God would do but they knew who God is.

2. God is worthy of our worship even when He doesn't give us what we want.

- “Even if He does not” is one of the most mature statements of faith in Scripture.

3. Pressure reveals worship.

- The threat of the furnace/death exposed what was already in their hearts.
- Pressure doesn't necessarily create our convictions. It reveals them.

4. Being faithful may mean standing alone.

- Three men stood while everyone else bowed. (300,000)
- Numbers don't determine truth.

5. God may deliver us from suffering—or through suffering. God is able.

- Christian faith isn't escapism.
- God's presence is promised even when His immediate rescue isn't.

6. The ultimate King is not an earthly King.

- Every earthly kingdom eventually falls.
- Daniel 2 already established that earthly kingdoms are temporary while God's kingdom is everlasting.
- Daniel 3 shows us what faithful citizens of God's kingdom look like while living under earthly kingdoms.

Big Idea

Faithfulness to God means refusing false worship, trusting Him with the outcome, and remembering that His presence is greater than the pressure of any earthly kingdom.