

# The Book of Daniel Lesson 3

## Chap 3 by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr

All too many interpreters have been tempted to interpret this narrative, about the enormous size of the golden image, the intense heat of the furnace and the miraculous deliverance of the three Hebrew captives, in a metaphorical or mythical manner, rather than treating it as an historical event, as it should be handled. But as Proverbs 29:25 taught, "The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever puts their trust in the LORD shall be safe." This is why it is possible that the three Hebrew captives may have been the very ones the writer of Hebrews had in mind as he went on to list those additional heroes of the faith as those "who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire" (Heb 11:34; emphasis mine) .

Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar's ragtime band struck up the music for a hot time for the three Hebrew nonconformists that would end up in the king's furnace (including: Hananiah ["Grace of the LORD"], Mishael ["Who is like God?"], and Azariah ["help of the LORD"]). All three of these Hebrew captives defiantly said in effect something like, "It's cool to be in the furnace for the Lord's sake!"

This narrative's plot-line seems to be laid out in seven scenes: (1) Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree to worship the golden image (3:1-7). (2) An accusation was made against the Jewish captives (3:8-12). (3) The Jews are threatened and given a second chance to bow down to the image (3:13-15). (4) The Three Hebrews confess their faith in God (3:16-18). (5) The three captives are cast into the furnace (3:19-23). (6) God delivers the three from the overheated furnace (3:24-27). (7) Nebuchadnezzar honors the three Jewish young people and their God (3:28-30).

Usually it is best to recognize each narrative scene in a sermon or

lesson with a major point in the message outline or teaching block, but seven points ordinarily are too many for the length of most class time, therefore we have combined the first three scenes and the last three scenes together, each as single points in the teaching outline, since they are so closely related in action and since it also keeps our session to a more manageable time limit of three major points in our teaching or preaching outline.

## **OUTLINE:**

**Title: "Experiencing God's Deliverance"**

**Text: Daniel 3:1-30**

**Focal Point:** vv. 17b-18b "...The God we serve is able to save us from [the furnace], and he will rescue us from your hand... But even if he does not,... we will not serve your gods or worship the image..."

**Homiletical Keyword: "Facts"**

**Interrogative:** What are the facts on how we can experience God's deliverance?

### **I. Our Faith May be Tested (3:1-15)**

A. By a Challenge: What God is Able to Rescue You?

B. By a Forced Pluralism or Eclecticism

C. By an Enticement to Sin

1. To pervert One's Faith

2. To Compromise One's Faith

3. To Conceal One's Faith

### **II. Our Answers Should be Readily Available (3:16-18)**

A. We Do Not Need to Defend Ourselves

B. Nothing is Too Hard for God

## C. Faith Has Four Elements

1. Full Commitment
2. Full Confidence
3. Full Resolution
4. Full Knowledge

## **III. Our Persecutors Must Acknowledge God's Deliverance (3:19-30)**

- A. In Spite of Their Anger
- B. In Spite of their Unbelief
- C. In Spite of One's Self

## **Conclusions**

(STUDY OF TEXT BEGINS...)

## **I. Our Faith May Be Tested (3:1-15)**

The absence of Daniel from this episode of the court narratives in Daniel 1-6 has occasioned lengthy discussions among interpreters as to why nothing is said about Daniel, but it is to be noted that Daniel was sometimes ill (Dan 8:27), and that his office as President of the Learned Societies of his day (2:48) may have excused him from such ceremonies as this day occasioned, or even that he may even have been out of town on royal business. We cannot say for sure, but it is clear that his three buddies were caught in a trap that may have been especially set for them, knowing the jealousy of the other wise men, who were not able to solve the content and meaning of the king's dream as Daniel had done.

Nebuchadnezzar had made an image some ninety feet in height and nine feet wide and had set it up on the Plain of Dura. For those who charge that ninety feet is too high for such a statue, let them remember that the Colossus of Rhodes, built around 300 B.C., was 105 feet high –

fifteen feet taller than this golden image! Others have incorrectly charged that the fact that this image was set up in the "Plain of Dura" shows the legendary nature of this account. However, three such localities bear this name "Dura" in the archaeological tablets from Babylonian era. In fact, the name "Dura" means "an enclosing wall," and it is also used to refer to a rectangular mound some 45 feet square and 20 feet high, as it appeared in one case as a possible base, or pedestal for an image. It is impossible to point to the precise place indicated here this late in time, but the name and meaning are well-attested from archaeological references.

#### A. By a Challenge: What God is Able to Rescue You?

The Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint (LXX<sup>1</sup>) dated this incident in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (apparently borrowing this date from Jeremiah 52:29). Nevertheless, all officialdom was invited to the "dedication" (verses 2-3 uses the same word in the original text, "Hanukkah," meaning "dedication" as appears in the Feast of Hanukkah, commemorating the "rededication" of the temple in the time of the Maccabees) of this golden image. Whether this was a representation of the king himself, inspired by his dream of the head of gold (as in chapter 2), or an image of a god, is not known. But the ceremony had the effect of pledging an oath of loyalty to the king, even though it clearly had an aura of worship along with it.

The role of the herald as a public crier or announcer of all royal edicts and injunctions is well illustrated in the times of the Bible. Failure to fall down in worship at the proper moment was subject to the penalty of death by being thrown into the flaming furnace (v.6).

The key statement in this section comes from the end of these three scenes, in verse 15, where the king asked: "What god is able to rescue you from my hand?" The form of this question is emphatic: "What [at all] god is there?" This pointed to the fact that the image may well have been a representation of a false god, as well as to the fact that Nebuchadnezzar assumed he had absolute authority over the lives of all those who were under his control. Judah had heard such vaunted

questions previously, such as when the Assyrian King Sennacherib of Assyria proudly threw in the face of the king of Judah, Hezekiah, the question, "Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria" (2 Kgs 18:33; Isa 36:18)?

### B. By a Forced Pluralism or Eclecticism

The new rule was that as soon as the six types of musical instruments began to play (rhetorically repeated to create some type of dignity and stateliness to this dedication scene in verses 5, 7, 10, and 15), all were to fall down and worship this image of gold. There may have been a bit of mischief behind this whole affair, for in verse 8 "some astrologers (Chaldeans) came forward and denounced the Jews." Thus, the idol-image became the occasion for forcing uniformity among all the people and leveling all faiths into one grand pagan scheme. In fact, those bringing the charges especially mentioned the fact that the insubordinates were "some Jews whom you [O king] have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon" (v.12). It is easy to detect the feelings of envy, jealousy, and competition shining through these words!

Evil persons may be able to harm our bodies, but God alone has control over both our bodies and our souls. No wonder our Lord warned us not to fear what men can do (Mt 10:17, 28).

### C. By an Enticement to Sin

This was a test for the three Hebrew captives. Its main feature was an enticement to sin. Such testing was not from God, for God never directly tempts anyone (Jam 1:13-14). James clearly taught that God cannot be tempted, nor does he tempt anyone. All who yield to temptation are those who are led away by their own desires. It is only when desire has conceived that it gives birth to sin and sin, warned James, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

My teacher, Robert D. Culver, found three temptations here. They were:

#### 1. The Temptation to Pervert One's Faith

This temptation played on the naturally healthy desire for a visible

manifestation of the Godhead. Philip illustrated that affliction in the Gospel of John when he demanded, "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied" (Jh 14:8). This same demand appeared earlier in Israel's history when Israel demanded of Aaron, after the prolonged absence of Moses, that Aaron make for them a god, for they feared Moses was now gone forever after forty days of absence from the camp. Unfortunately, he obliged their request and made the golden calf as he announced, "These are your gods, O Israel that brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex 32:4). What makes polytheism so popular is that it widens our choices and makes few, if any, real limitations imposed on our freedoms. On the other hand, monotheism gives us only one choice; therefore, once we have made that choice, we must leave all other gods or anything that would compete with the One and only true God.

## 2. To Compromise One's Faith

James once again warns us in 4:4 that we must beware of forming friendships with the world, for friendship with the world is hatred towards God. This is because we compromise and try to walk two paths simultaneously.

Of course, the three Hebrews could have agreed amongst themselves that this golden image was nothing, so it would not hurt them if they went along to keep up the appearances of persons who were loyal to the throne. But such an accommodating action would violate the second commandment. Deuteronomy 5:8-9 clearly stated that such actions would provoke the Living God; mortals were not to bow down to an idol in heaven above, on the earth, or anything beneath the earth.

## 3. To Conceal One's Faith

Even King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to know from these three men, "Is it true? (v.14). In a situation such as this one, do we try to conceal what we really believe or do we say what is the truth? This narrative wants to teach us that there is no other option but to tell the truth.

## **II. Our Answers Should Be Readily Available (3:16-18)**

### A. We Do Not Need to Defend Ourselves

The men declared that they did not need to defend themselves. This was not the answer of arrogance, but the answer of lives that had been clearly observable and under scrutiny from all the time they had been in Babylon. In fact, there was nothing more to say, for what they had said was true. They were confident that the God they served was able to deliver them (v.17).

### B. Nothing is Too Hard for God

This principle had been taught in the question asked in Genesis 18:14, "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" Jeremiah 32:17, 27 would repeat the same teaching, "Nothing is too hard/difficult/ marvelous for the LORD." Zechariah 8:6 raised the point again: "It may seem too marvelous/difficult/hard to the remnant of this people at his time, but will it seem marvelous/too hard/too difficult to me? declares the LORD." Jesus had to teach this principle to the boy's father, whose son was possessed by an evil Spirit, "Everything is possible for the one who believes" (Mk 9:23). Jesus himself laid claim to this same truth in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Father, everything is possible for you" (Mk 14:36).

These three men were sure God would be able to deliver them out of the hand of the king and his golden image, but their chief concern at that moment was the glory and vindication of God's name and reputation.

### C. Faith Must Show Four Elements

Even if God's will and action in this particular case might be different than they wished for and would find pleasant, their obedience would not be contingent on God's answering their prayers in the way they hoped would happen. After all, while 100 prophets of the Lord were spared in the days of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (while Jezebel killed off many prophets of the Lord) by Obadiah, who was a sort of Secretary of State for that corrupt government, godly Uriah was not spared from being executed even though Jeremiah was so spared (Jer 26:20). Again, godly James was not spared King Herod's sword, while Peter did experience his own deliverance (Acts 12:2). Herein lies part of the mystery of God (Dt 29:29). Why does God rescue some and not everyone all the time? The answer lies in the mystery of his

perfect will, which when we see our Lord, it will become plain for all to see.

The faith of these three men, however, did exhibit four elements:

#### 1. True Faith Has Full Commitment

These men saw no need for further talk, therefore they were not choosing their words carefully so that they could escape by virtue of their wordsmithing (v.16b). Instead, they were fully committed to the Lord regardless of the outcome of the trial they would be forced to undergo.

#### 2. True Faith Had Full Confidence

This did mean, however, that they had no reservations on God's ability to save them or to be with them even in the midst of the fiery furnace (v.17). To deny God's omnipotence was to deny God's very existence. How could God be any less God than One who could act in such a situation as this?

#### 3. True Faith Has Full Resolution

These three Hebrew captives were determined to disobey the command to fall down before this golden image, no matter what consequences might incur. They resolutely affirmed, "Even if [our God] does not [rescue us], we want you to know O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (v.18).

#### 4. True Faith Has Full Knowledge

As Hebrews 13:6 would later say, "The Lord is my Helper and I will not fear what man shall do to me." Their understanding of who God was did not rise or fall on any one incident that may not for the moment have seemed to fall within an expected deliverance pattern. God would still be God and his will would still be the One that was being worked out.

### **III. Our Persecutors Must Acknowledge God's Deliverance (3:19-30)**

#### A. In Spite of Their Anger (vv.19-23)



Nebuchadnezzar was angry in verse 13, but that anger increased in verse 19. Now his anger becomes almost irrational as he orders the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual (v.19). Likewise, he ordered "some of the strongest soldiers in his army" (v.20a) "to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and throw them into the blazing furnace" (v.20b). It is not clear why he wanted a show of this sort of strength, unless he was now fearing that there would be a show of divine force on behalf of these men. Perhaps the boldness of the captives was beginning to get to him! However, the fire was so intense that the flames leaping from the furnace killed the strong men who merely tossed the three bound men into the super heated furnace (v.22).

#### B. In Spite of Their Unbelief (vv.24-25)

Amazingly enough, the more Nebuchadnezzar persecuted, the more he confirmed their witness. For when the three captives fell into the scorching heat of the fire (apparently from above the oven), all securely tied up, suddenly Nebuchadnezzar can hardly believe his eyes. Instead of three men in the furnace, he now counted four in the furnace (v.24)! To make sure his eyes and memory had not failed him, he asked his advisors, "Weren't there three men we tied up and threw into the furnace? (v.24). Naturally, their response was, "Certainly, O king" (v.24c); there had been only three!

Interestingly enough, it was the king who exclaimed, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods" (v.25). Surely that must have been a real eye-popper for this monarch. His questions must have come one after another. How did the men get loose? Why are they not burning up? Why are their clothes not on fire? Why are they walking around in the oven? And who is that fourth one with them? Why does he have an angelic or divine appearance?

Had not the Lord himself promised to be with his people in such circumstances as are cited in Isaiah 43:1-2? "Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you [Israel] by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you ... When you walk

through the fire, you will not be burned, and the flame will not consume you.”

That fourth person was no one less than a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity. Apparently, only the king must have seen this fourth person in the furnace, which is most fitting indeed, since he was the one who dared to raise the question as to whether there was any god who could rescue these men from the fire, or from the edicts given in the name of this king. Now he is the one to realize that there was exactly one such God, the One who was now with the three men, who were at this moment walking around in the fire as if it were an afternoon stroll. In the mouth of this royal polytheist, his description of Christ is more fitting to match an “angel,” or one from the pantheon of gods – though false gods never showed such power as this! But for those who have read the Scriptures, this One is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Mt 16:16). Too bad Nebuchadnezzar would not cry out like the disciple Thomas, “My Lord and my God” (Jh 20:29). But for those who were in the furnace, the reality of the presence of the Son of God was affirming by their experience of the real presence of the Son of God.

### C. In Spite of One’s Self (vv.26-30)

It is now Nebuchadnezzar’s turn to act, for he now approaches the opening of the furnace on its ground level and he cried out, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” (v.26). This is the second time this monarch had been given more than enough reason to drop his worship of all his idols and worship the true and Living God (cf. Dan 2:47). And he will be given one more opportunity after he recovers from his insanity (4:34), but there is no evidence in the Bible that he ever was truly converted.

Four sets of royal advisors (satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisors) crowded around the three men who had been set for incineration (v.27) only to find, as they themselves took note: (1) the fire had not hurt them; (2) their hair was not singed; (3) their robes were not scorched; (4) there was no smell of fire on them (27b-c); and (5) they were unbound (v.25). The only thing that the fire was

able to affect was the king's rope that bound each man.

The trust of these three men and the power of their God really affected Nebuchadnezzar. Almost involuntarily he rendered praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (v.28). He thought that God had sent his "angel" to deliver the men, but he realized that these three had trusted in this Lord and they had defied the royal command of a mortal king as they chose to worship only this one God (v.28c-d).

The king therefore issued a decree that anyone of any nation or language who dared to "say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach or Abednego [would] be cut into pieces, and their houses [would] be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way" (v.29). Notice that, if no one could detract from God's greatness, even though they were pagans, how much more care should be taken by God's own children who unwittingly, and sometimes deliberately, often steal glory from the majesty and power of God? Defiance of a Babylonian king was put into direct juxtaposition with the full trust in the real God. Note which had the greater effectiveness!

The king then promoted (v.30) the three men in the province of Babylon. I wonder how that was received by those who had raised the trouble for these men in the first place? Had they not hoped these three men would be gone and some of them would have been promoted instead? This is nothing but high irony: the people had been gathered to worship the golden image, but were treated instead to personally witness how God will personally intervene to rescue those who bow down to him and worship him. Surely this was missions in action in the Old Testament, and in Babylon itself, by three witnesses for the truthfulness of the Lord they served. Therefore, once again, all the nations of the earth were blessed by the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:3). So committed were these three, that they would rather suffer death than bow down to another (pretend) god.

## **Conclusions**

1. Our Lord can be depended on to either deliver us or to see that

right is done.

2. We must decide to serve him even if God's will is not to deliver us.

3. By faith, we and these men, can quench the violence of fire.

4. By faith (we and) they were loosed from their cords that bound them.

5. By faith (we and) they were comforted in their trials as the Strong Son of God stood right beside them.

6. By faith God was glorified and by faith his servants were rewarded as they were willing to be faithful to death and thereby to receive a crown of life (Rev 2:10).

By Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., PhD

1. The Septuagint, often referred to as the "LXX" (the Roman number for 70), was a Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures translated from the Hebrew by approx. 70 Jewish scholars in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. that was later adopted by early Greek-speaking Christians.

Link to Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. website: [www.walterckaiserjr.com](http://www.walterckaiserjr.com)