

Daniel – Chapter 3

- *Meanwhile -- some time later*

Because we are so familiar with this story first presented to us in Sunday school we have to remind ourselves that this is real history that actually happened. The Babylonians kept very accurate records as most advanced civilizations normally do. From these records it appears that this next event recorded in the book of Daniel takes place about 18 to 20 years after Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

Daniel 3:1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

- *The entire Statue of Gold*

With the passage of time the memory of that dream may have dimmed in Nebuchadnezzar's mind, and his body may have begun to remind him, just as it does for us, that he is mortal. Perhaps egged on by his advisers, some of whom were still looking for an opportunity against the Hebrew upstarts, Nebuchadnezzar embarks on an ego trip of royal proportions. In contrast to his dream where the statue only had a head of gold, this statue was made of gold in its entirety.

- *60 Cubits*

The King James translation gives the dimensions of the statue in cubits. According to most of the archaeological records, a cubit is about 18 inches. That makes it about 90 feet high as the NIV reads.

- *Plain of Dura*

The word Dura means a place enclosed by a wall and in this case was a spot to about 6 mi. south east of Babylon.

- *The governing elite assembles*

All the important people in the King's administration were required to show up for the dedication of the statue.

Daniel 3:2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.

Daniel 3:3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

- *A test of loyalty and obedience*

From the ancient cuneiform records first translated in 1956, it was discovered that in 596BC there was an attempted revolt which may have caused Nebuchadnezzar to build the statue and use it as a vehicle to make everyone in his kingdom swear allegiance to him. We know from later history that the Caesars of Rome also required the citizens to worship and that the Christians who refused were executed for treason.

Daniel 3:4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: □

Daniel 3:5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Daniel 3:6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

- *Career and life threatening*

It was made abundantly clear to the assembled officials and bureaucrats as well as ordinary citizens, that failure to pass the test of obedience and loyalty would not only end their career, but their lives. To emphasize this was a column of smoke from the fiery furnace visible to all assembled there. Archaeologists digging around in Iraq have found execution furnaces that date back to the time of Daniel. These furnaces were huge, over 30 ft. high with a 12 ft. baking chamber.

- *Enforced State Religion*

Is this example of enforced state religion prophetic of the time to come as listed in Revelation ?

Revelation 13:6 He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.

Revelation 13:7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

Revelation 13:8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

Notice the similarity of Revelation 13:7 to Daniel 3:4 in the inclusiveness of who is required to worship.

- *Another image to come*

Here in Daniel the object of worship was an image, so again in Revelation there is the requirement to worship yet another image.

Revelation 13:14 Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived.

Revelation 13:15 He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

Again and again it is so very evident that the Bible is a divinely engineered book and that certain themes and idioms are used consistently by the Holy Spirit throughout. The events related here in Daniel are confined to the Babylonian empire, but in Revelation the word Earth is used in contrast with the word Heaven and therefore strongly indicates that the events related there apply to the entire planet.

- *Universal worship*

Daniel 3:7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Since the Babylonians worshiped many idols, adding another one to the list was no big deal for them. For the Hebrews however, who worshiped the one true God it was specifically prohibited to worship any idol or image.

- *The rivals seize their chance*

Daniel 3:8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews.

Daniel 3:9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! □

Daniel 3:10 You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold,

Daniel 3:11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

Daniel 3:12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon-- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

Even though almost two decades have passed, the astrologers and wise men had not forgotten that they had been passed over for promotion because they could not tell the king his dream. They had conveniently forgotten that they would have been history long ago if it were not for Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These are now accused of direct disobedience to the king's order. For some reason however, Daniel was unavailable to be accused also at this time.

- *Governments hate loss of control over their people*

Daniel 3:13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,

Daniel 3:14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?"

All governments, whether monarchies, dictatorships or democracies become unglued if the citizens fail to obey the law, no matter whether the law is just or unjust. Nebuchadnezzar was no exception.

- *A second chance and a challenge to God*

Daniel 3:15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

They are given a second chance, but at the same time a proud Nebuchadnezzar challenges God. He had forgotten what Daniel had said to him concerning the God of heaven and that He is the one that had given Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom and dominion. The God who loves all men but hates pride will later humble the king, but for now Nebuchadnezzar and all those gathered there are about to see the power of God.

- *No way Jose -- will we worship*

Daniel 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.

Daniel 3:17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.

Daniel 3:18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

The three Hebrews tell the king that their refusal still stands and furthermore they tell him that God is able to rescue them, but even if in his sovereignty he decides not to do so, they will nevertheless be obedient to their God, rather than to the king.

- *Civil disobedience*

Daniel 3:19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are listed as officials of the king in cuneiform tablets found in Babylon. They had been serving the king faithfully for years. However it says that Nebuchadnezzar's attitude toward them changed. He did not really want to kill them, but he could not afford to let this very public act of disobedience go unpunished. Again we meet the number seven, the number of completion signifying in this case that the furnace was to be heated as hot as it could possibly get.

- *Governmental authority is limited*

Even though Scripture admonishes Christians generally to obey their government, the power of any government is not absolute and the power to compel worship is definitely outside the scope of governmental authority. However, if a believer defies the government, he or she must be prepared to face whatever consequences may arise from that.

Daniel 3:20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

Acts 5:28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"

- *The sentence is carried out immediately*

Daniel 3:21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. □

Daniel 3:22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,

Daniel 3:23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

In contrast to our modern system of justice where it usually takes years between a conviction of death and the execution thereof, there was only enough time delay here to get the furnace up to the hottest possible temperature.

- *The king can't believe his eyes*

Daniel 3:24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king."

Daniel 3:25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

We tied three up and now there are four unbound and walking around in the fire and the fourth looks like "BAR ELOHIM". The word "ELOHIM" is a plural form that in this place is usually translated together with "BAR" as son of gods. The word ELOHIM is used in the first verse of the Bible and in many other places where it is translated as God. So here we have the son of God saving the three Hebrews from the fiery furnace as a picture of the son of God saving us from the fires of hell. Here is another example of the many patterns found in scripture.

- *A crowd gathers*

Daniel 3:26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,

Daniel 3:27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

The king gets up and comes as close to the opening of the furnace as the intense heat permits and the rest of the court gathers around him. Some skeptics have said that these execution furnaces had cold spots and that is why the three were not burned. The problem with that however is that it was a very selective fire that only burned their bindings.

- *Our turn in the fire may come*

While it is not likely that we may get thrown into a literal furnace of fire any time soon, we can rest assured that whatever kind of fire it maybe, Jesus himself will be there with us.

- *The king was impressed*

Daniel 3:28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

Daniel 3:29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

Daniel 3:30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar was impressed and quickly grasped the fact that the God of these three that had just come out of the fiery furnace is more powerful than all the other Babylonian gods put together. He immediately threatened to impose his favorite draconian punishment upon anyone who would badmouth the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. As he said this, it is possible to imagine him glaring at those who had accused these three men and perhaps thinking to himself that he should have imposed this punishment on them years ago when they failed to tell him and interpret his dream.

- *Prophetic symbolism of fire*

Psalms 21:9 At the time of your appearing you will make them like a fiery furnace. In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them.

Hebrews 10:27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Fire in Scripture is consistently associated with judgment of the wicked and in some cases with the burning away of wickedness in the righteous ones. Daniel is a prophetic book, so the question we may ask: Are these three Hebrews who were preserved supernaturally through the fire a picture of the nation of Israel to be preserved supernaturally through the trial that is to come upon the whole Earth, generally known as the Great Tribulation? I believe that this is God's pattern.

- *Where was Daniel?*

One thing to pay attention to when reading the Bible, and that is true of course of some other books also, is to notice carefully what is omitted. In this entire episode Daniel is conspicuous by his absence. Where was Daniel during all this? It even may have been Daniel's absence that gave his adversaries the courage to conspire against his three friends before the king.

- *Three possibilities*

The Bible is silent on his whereabouts, so let us consider some possibilities. 1) Did he bow down to the golden statue and thereby escape? 2) Did he refuse to worship but his enemies did not notice it or fail to report him to the king? 3) Was he far away, out of reach at the time?

- *In a distant province or country?*

He obviously was not there, otherwise he surely would also have been forced to worship the golden image which he certainly wouldn't as a God fearing worshiper of Jehovah. Since he was second in command he might have been on the king's business in a distant part of the empire or even in a foreign country.

- *Daniel a picture of the church?*

Is Daniel, who is called highly beloved, (Dan 9:23) representative of the church, the beloved bride of Christ, preserved from the time of tribulation in contrast to his three friends

Revelation 3:10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

That huge golden statue obviously was not built overnight and Daniel as prime minister must certainly have had, at the very least, knowledge of its construction. However, when the **time** of its dedication came and the decree of the king calling for its worship, Daniel was out of the picture. Will the church also be absent at the **time** when worship of the image is decreed as recorded in the book of Revelation? I believe so.

- *Apocalyptic writers*

As an engineer I have been trained and practiced all my life to observe patterns. I believe that the God who engineered the universe also deals in patterns. Daniel, the writer of the Old Testament apocalypse is called beloved and so is the apostle John, the writer of the New Testament apocalypse. Enoch and Noah also fit a pattern, where the former is taken away before the time of the flood and the latter is preserved supernaturally through the flood. Think about these patterns I have mentioned, not as required doctrines that could divide, but exciting themes tying together different parts of the scriptures.

- *Take your stand*

The time for us to take a stand and be counted on God's side will surely come, though hopefully not in such a dramatic way as it did for the three heroes of our study. However, we can be assured that when and in whatever form the test comes, He that holds our life and total being in His hand will be at our side, so we too can pass whatever test may come to His glory only.