

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S BLASPHEMOUS IMAGE & THE FIERY FURNACE

Daniel 3

Main Idea of the Text: There is only one God, and we must serve Him, regardless of the cost.

I. THE TEXT

a. Context

- i. The events of Daniel 3 possibly occur around 587 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, placing the “fiery furnace” some 15-20 years after Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were deported to Babylon.
- ii. As Nebuchadnezzar’s empire grows, so does his megalomania. The dream interpretation of Daniel 2 aggravates his pride, which swells to the heavens. God will soon begin dismantling his reign and power.

b. Outline

i. Nebuchadnezzar Constructs a Blasphemous Image (Dan 3:1-7)

1. The Image Described (Dan 3:1)

- a. Nebuchadnezzar’s response to the dream about a golden-headed statue being destroyed is to build a statue entirely of gold. The message is clear. Nebuchadnezzar declares there will be no empire but his, no kings after him. Babylon will be eternal.
- b. The dimensions of the statue (90’x9’) are grotesque if it was shaped like a human. It could also have been an obelisk.

2. Nebuchadnezzar Gathers His Imperial Officials (Dan 3:2-3)

- a. Satraps governed regions (satrapies) of the empire. Nebuchadnezzar has gathered the nations to a tower, reminding us of Babel (Gen 11).

3. The Officials are Compelled to Show Obeisance to the Image (Dan 3:4-7)

- a. Bowing down would have violated the first and second commandments.
- b. It's possible this command incited the vassal king of Judah, Zedekiah (Jehoiakim) to make alliance with Edom which God had forbidden (Jer 27), ultimately leading to his rebellion from Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar's subsequent destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC.
- c. The instruments listed include Greek loan words (harp, lyre, bagpipe), demonstrating the vastness of the empire.

ii. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego Refuse to Worship the Image (Dan 3:8-30)

- 1. The Hebrews are Accused & Questioned (Dan 3:8-15)
 - a. Daniel may have been far away on imperial business as he is curiously absent from the narrative.
 - b. Because this has been a public decree, Nebuchadnezzar must act to solidify his authority.
- 2. The Hebrews Respond with Faithful Defiance (Dan 3:16-18)
 - a. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond that they would die before they would bow.
 - b. They are willing to accept the consequences of their civil disobedience.
- 3. Nebuchadnezzar Fails to Execute the Hebrews (Dan 3:19-30)
 - a. The furnace being 7 times hotter than normal is figurative language for "as hot as it will go."
 - b. The Hebrews are joined in the fire by either a Christophany or an angel such as Gabriel or Michael.
 - c. After surviving, the Hebrews are promoted.
 - d. Nebuchadnezzar does not abandon his idolatry. He only states the supremacy of the Hebrew deity.

c. Key Observations

- i. Nebuchadnezzar's Pride Swells

1. His response to the dream of the image is to erect an image that wholly symbolizes himself and his reign.
 2. Gathering the nations to the image means he's forcing "global" worship.
- ii. Faithfulness in the Face of Persecution
1. The Hebrew children are not "heroes," as much as they are what ordinary believers ought to be.
 2. They do, however, become a living example to believers in every age.
- d. Summary of the Passage
- i. Nebuchadnezzar's tries to coerce the worship and fealty of his empire and vassals, but he is resisted by Hebrew officials who chose to honor the Lord and are preserved from execution by God.

II. THE TRUTH

- a. Central Theological Theme(s)
 - i. There is only one living and true God who commands and deserves our worship.
- b. Confession of Faith & Creeds
 - i. LCF Chapter
 1. Chapter 2 – Of God and the Holy Trinity
 - a. 2:1 "The Lord our God is but one only living and true God"
 - ii. Daniel 3 contrasts the pagan, polytheistic worship of the Babylonians with the monotheism of the Hebrews.
- c. Development from the Text
 - i. About God: God alone is the Lord who deserves fealty. The blasphemous image of Daniel 3 is an affront to the first and second commandments. (Exod 20:3, 4)
 - ii. About Humanity: While we may consider monotheism the norm, we must remember that the ancient world considered polytheism normal. At the end of this passage, Nebuchadnezzar has not become a monotheist. He simply

declares the supremacy of Yahweh over the other deities. He is “most high” among and over others.

iii. Chair Passages: 1 Cor 8:4, 6; Deut 6:4

d. Redemptive-Historical & Christological Connections

i. Redemptive Historical

1. Until Christ returns, beastly governments (Rev. 13) will persecute the saints by trying to coerce their worship. Christians must not be surprised when the “fiery trial” comes but instead rejoice that we share in Christ’s suffering. (1 Pet 4:12, 13)

ii. Christological

1. It’s possible (likely?) that the fourth man in the fire was the pre-incarnate Christ.
2. Regardless, Christians under the New Covenant always have a fourth man with them. Christ abides with us every moment by his indwelling Spirit.

e. Key Theological Truth

- i. We are to worship and obey God alone, for there is no other God.

III. THE TRANSFORMATION

APPLICATION PROMPTS	YOUR APPLICATION
1. Heart & Personal Life • <i>What idol or fear does this expose?</i> • <i>Where do I need deeper repentance or trust?</i> • <i>How does this comfort or confront me?</i>	
2. Family & Home • <i>How does this shape marriage?</i> • <i>Parenting or relating to parents?</i> • <i>What would change at home?</i>	
3. Church Community • <i>How should this shape LWBC?</i> • <i>Our unity, witness, or worship?</i> • <i>What corporate response is needed?</i>	
4. Work & Daily Calling • <i>How does this affect my work?</i> • <i>Integrity, excellence, or rest?</i> • <i>Witness in the workplace?</i>	
5. Witness to Unbelievers • <i>How does this speak to non-Christians?</i> • <i>What hope or warning does it give?</i> • <i>How can I share this truth?</i>	
6. Mind, Affections & Will • <i>What must I believe more deeply?</i> • <i>What affections need stirring?</i> • <i>What specific obedience is called for?</i>	