

Series: The Book of Daniel
"Faith that Prevails"
Chapter 3

Introduction

In Chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar erects an image of gold and demands everyone worship it or face the fiery furnace.

In Babylon, Daniel and his friends would be thoroughly tested.

- The challenge to their walk was followed by
- the challenge to their witness, followed by
- the challenge to their worship.

Nebuchadnezzar built the image of gold in the eighteenth year of his reign – the same year he burned Jerusalem (586 B.C.) Daniel and his friends have been in Babylon for almost twenty years when King Nebuchadnezzar decides to build a statue. Verse 1 says, "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height *was* sixty cubits *and* its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon." ([Daniel 3:1 NKJV](#))

There is probably a link between Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and the image he makes in Daniel 3. It seems that Nebuchadnezzar deliberately made a statue of gold to proclaim his reign and authority would never end. It was an action in direct contradiction to God's plan. The image was 90 feet high and 9 feet wide.

On the plains of Dura, there still stands a mound, about twenty feet high which is an exact square of about forty-six feet at the base, resembling the pedestal of a colossal statue. Verse 2 says, "And King Nebuchadnezzar sent *word* to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up." ([Daniel 3:2-3 NKJV](#))

Satrap is a Persian word that means "protector of the realm." It refers to a specific category of public officials. The decree required eight classes of officials and leaders to attend:

- princes – which included satraps and personal advisors
- governors – rulers over the various provinces
- captains – deputy rulers and military personnel
- judges – assistant to the king in interpreting the law
- treasurers – those in charge of finance
- counselors – lawyers, and education officials
- sheriffs – supreme magistrates (cabinet members)
- rulers – state and civil officers

Verse 4 says, "Then a herald cried aloud, "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, *and* lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down *and* worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up." (Daniel 3:4-7 NKJV)

Heralds were public announcers. They were the "press" or "media" of their day. There was also an impressive orchestra. Nebuchadnezzar regarded refusing to worship the image as treason. The King was not a man who allowed lawbreakers to go unpunished. In a cuneiform writing, Nebuchadnezzar is described as so devoted to justice that "he did not rest night or day." Verse 7 says, "So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, *and* lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down *and* worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up." (Daniel 3:7 NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar's idol worship was accompanied by elaborate and well-produced music. When the people heard the music begin to play, they were to fall down and worship the image. But three Hebrew men refuse the demand. Verse 8 says, "Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up." (Daniel 3:8-12 NKJV)

These Chaldeans were quick to point out that these three Jews did not serve the Babylonian gods or worship the gold image. The three Jewish men must have known they would be discovered, but they obeyed God's commands anyway. Authentic believers can't go through life without being discovered. We are like a lighted candle that cannot be hidden. In verse 13, Nebuchadnezzar interviews the disobedient Hebrew men, "Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "*Is it* true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *that* you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, *good!* But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who *is* the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Daniel 3:13-15 NKJV)

To his credit, Nebuchadnezzar didn't accept the accusation on hearsay. He made sure of it with a personal interview. He asks, "Is it true?" It was a great test for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. It's one thing to make a stand for God; it's another to stick with it when pointedly asked, "Is it true?" Nebuchadnezzar would not tolerate defiance on such an important occasion.

Imagine the enormous pressure on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to compromise. The only person smiling down on them was God! Nebuchadnezzar says, "Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" Now we have a contest because these three Hebrew men insist they will never worship the image. In verse 16, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18 NKJV)

They saw no need to defend themselves. Their guilt was obvious - they clearly would not bow down to this image. They knew that God could save them from the burning fiery furnace and the hand of Nebuchadnezzar himself. But if not, they also knew they must do what is right even if God does not do what they expect or hope Him to do.

They didn't doubt God's ability, nor did they presume to know God's will. They recognized that God's plan might be different than their desires. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego show us that "small" things really do matter. They knew that God had unlimited authority and power. But they also knew their faith would require action and maybe even sacrifice.

They could have said, "We could lose our jobs and standard of living if we go through with this." They could have said, "even if we bow down, we're not really bowing down in our hearts." They could have said, "everybody else is doing it, we could just bow down and repent later." But instead, they cultivated a brave character that was willing to stand alone. They could have said, "It's only once and not for long." Just ten minutes before the king. Why throw our lives away for ten minutes. But in ten minutes you can chart a course for eternity. The three Hebrew men were not motivated by the consequences, they were inspired to do the right thing and leave the results with the Lord.

Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who *were* in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, *and cast them* into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. And these three men,

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. (Daniel 3:19-23 NKJV)

Before their final statement, the king spoke kindly, almost fatherly, to them as "wayward boys." He wanted to give them a chance to reconsider. But after hearing their bold challenge, the expression on his face changed. Infuriated by their stance, Nebuchadnezzar went into a tirade. He demanded the furnace be heated seven times hotter than ordinary. It was so hot that the flames killed the men that threw them into the furnace.

Despite the intense intimidation, they stayed courageous in their confession of faith. In verse 24, Nebuchadnezzar sees four alive and well in the furnace. "Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished, and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (Daniel 3:24-25 NKJV)

It's amazing that anyone would survive even a moment inside the furnace when others perished at the door. The Septuagint says that Nebuchadnezzar's attention was caught when he heard them singing praises in the furnace. As the king walks away with a satisfied look, he is immediately stopped by the sound of singing coming from the furnace. He peers inside and sees four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire.

Nebuchadnezzar says, "I see four men loose, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Jesus was literally with them during the worst of their trial. We don't know if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego *knew* the Son of God was with them in their fiery trial. Sometimes we are aware of Jesus' presence in our trials, and sometimes we are not - but He is there nonetheless. God can either deliver us *from* a trial or miraculously sustain and strengthen us *in* a trial?

Nebuchadnezzar took the fourth person in the fire to be an angel or some supernatural being. In verse 28, the king says, "God sent His angel and delivered His servants who trusted Him." Nebuchadnezzar also observed that the four men were *free* in the fire. The fire only burnt the ropes that bound them.

Verse 26 says, "Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace *and* spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come *here*." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them." (Daniel 3:26-27 NKJV)

The witness of these three Jews was that they were serving a true and living God, and the king recognized their testimony was valid. The trial had no power over them because they were totally submitted to the power and will of God. In verse 28, "Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! (Daniel 3:28 NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar gives God glory, but he does not embrace Him as his God. The King knows about God but does not yet know Him personally. In verse 29, he says, "Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon." (Daniel 3:29-30 NKJV)

Nebuchadnezzar must admit, "No other God can deliver like this." Seeing God at work in the lives of those three men was an extremely effective testimony to Nebuchadnezzar - and to us. So, what can we learn from Chapter 3?

I. Be True To God

Those who prevail in faith are true to God. When the King gathered all his officials together to dedicate this golden image and fall down before it, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't bow down. They made their choice, even knowing the danger it posed to their lives.

And sure enough, the report came to the king. These accusing officials saw this moment as a golden opportunity to eliminate some of the competition. But despite all their threats and the king's rage, they remained faithful to God.

II. Put Your Life In God's Hands

Those who prevail in faith put their life in God's hands. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were well aware that they would be thrown into the fire. But they have strong faith in God. In response to the king's taunt, "who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" they confess that their God is more than able to deliver them if he wants to. But even if God chooses not to do this, they will still be faithful to Him. We prevail in faith not because God delivers us but because we are devoted to Him no matter what.

III. God Is With Us In Our Trials

Those who prevail with faith know God is with them in their trials. Instead of getting better, things got even worse for the three Hebrew men. The king was furious, and his countenance changed. The furnace was heated seven times hotter and was so hot it killed the men who threw them into it. But God didn't abandon them.

The king saw an extra person in the furnace. Who was the fourth man? Could it be one of the angels, called sons of God? Or was this the Son of God? God was there with them in the midst of their trial. Whatever trials we face, God is always there with us when we trust God and put our life in His hands.

IV. God Honors Our Faith

Those who prevail in faith know that God always comes through. We are committed to knowing and serving God, whether by death or in life. There are no guarantees that we will survive the fiery furnace, but we do know that God will be there to walk with us. For those who prevail in faith, the fire of the furnace has no power. The apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain." (Philippians 1:21 NKJV)

In Romans 14:8, he says, "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:8 NKJV)

Conclusion

In 1 Peter 2:10, Peter calls Christians "sojourners and exiles" in this world. Every believer faces times of trial and testing. So when you're going through fiery trials, remember to be true to God. Don't let difficult circumstances lead you to be unfaithful. James 1:2 says, "Blessed is the one who remains steadfast under trial."

Always put your life in God's hands. Hebrews 13:6 says, "the Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Whether God delivers us from our trial or not, we know that God will take care of us. Always remember that God is with you. In Hebrews 13:5, God says, "I will never leave you or forsake you." Isaiah 43:2 says, "I will be with you . . . when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flames shall not consume you." God never leaves us alone.

Never forget that God always honors your faith in Him. We don't always know how he will do this. He may work through a miracle or strengthen us to endure and overcome in the midst of the trial or by rescuing us from the evil of this world. God is faithful, and he will always come through. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*." (1 Corinthians 10:13 NKJV)

Remember, you are not the first to ever face trials and difficulties. There are many examples in the Scriptures that can help and encourage us. We can learn from the testimony of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and be strengthened to endure and overcome just as they did.