



THE BOOK OF
D A N I E L

*The Most High
God rules over
the kingdoms of
the world and
appoints anyone
he desires to
rule over them.*

(Dan 5:21b NLT)

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The Inquisition (3:13–18)

3:13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,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?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?”¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.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.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.” (NIV)

3:13 *Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.* ¹⁴ *Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?” (ESV)*

- It's easy to see how an absolute monarch like Nebuchadnezzar would have been enraged at what **he** viewed, as presumptuous behavior on the part of these three men.
- He is perhaps **especially** upset that he had recently **promoted** these men per Daniel's recommendation.
- From **his** point of view, it is unbelievable that **anyone** would be so bold as to **refuse** to obey an edict issued by the king.
- At the same time, he seems to allow for the fact that there may have just been a misunderstanding here.
- He is, no doubt, aware of the fact that it **may** have been **jealousy** that motivated their accusers.
- So, in fairness to these men, Nebuchadnezzar gives them an opportunity to speak for themselves.

3:15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall **immediately** be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" (ESV)

- Without waiting to hear their response to his question, Nebuchadnezzar gives these young men another opportunity to do the “right thing” (as he sees it).
- Possibly he had grown fond of them, or perhaps he felt that it would be a pity to lose three capable men – especially since he had made such a large investment of time and money in them.
- The king offered to have the orchestra play ***just for them***.
- If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would bow down before the image, all would be well.
- But if not, they would be thrown “*immediately*” into the blazing furnace.

3:15 Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning *fiery furnace*. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar then added, "*And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?*"
- The language here is emphatic.
- The God these men serve (Yahweh) had proven himself **powerful** by revealing the content and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but **surely** even such a great god as Yahweh would not be able to protect his followers from death in a "*fiery furnace*".
- Nebuchadnezzar **may** even be deliberately **challenging** Yahweh at this point.
- If the young men did not change their minds and bow to the image, surely **no god** will be able to deliver them.

3:16 *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. (ESV)*

- Here we see that the initial response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the charges leveled against them is simply to concede that they are, in fact, guilty: They had ***deliberately*** disobeyed the king's command.
- There is no arrogance in their reply.
- The three are simply acknowledging that the indictment laid against them was correct and there is no defense or apology that can be made.
- They have ***utterly*** cast themselves upon the mercy of God.
- This is a case where they are compelled to serve God rather than man.
- Many years later, these men would be ***honored*** for their noble faith by the writer of Hebrews when he writes about those who by faith ***“quenched the power of fire”***. (Heb 11:34)

3:17 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. 18 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.” (ESV)

- The statement “*our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... But if not...*” does not mean that they questioned the **ability** or **power** of God to deliver them.
- They do not doubt for a minute that their God has the power to deliver them from the king’s furnace
- But at the same time, they realize that they have no right to **presume** that He will do so.
- These young men recognized that God’s will might be different from what they would prefer, and they were willing for that to be the case, without complaining.

3:17 *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. 18 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.” (ESV)*

- Too often Christians complain **vigorously** when God’s will in a particular situation is **different** from what **they** would prefer.
- These men did not make their own obedience contingent upon God’s doing that which was pleasant to them.
- They were ready to obey God, whether he chose to deliver them from the furnace or not.
- In other words, the object of their affection was God **Himself, not** what God **could do** for them.

3:17 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. 18 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.” (ESV)

- The bottom line is that, had these young men **died** in the flames, they would **not** have regarded their deaths to have been the result of a lack of faith on their part.
- As it turns out, in their utter dependence on God’s will, their faith did **indeed** quench flames (Heb 11:34).
- But the writer of Hebrews tells us that **others** who had a **similar** faith “**were tortured**, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. **Others suffered** mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword...**” (Heb 11:35–37).

The Sentence (3:19-23)

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 usual²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.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,²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. (NIV)

3:19 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. ²⁰ And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.” (ESV)

- The bold words and unrepentant attitude of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego caused Nebuchadnezzar to become *“filled with fury”* towards them.¹
- *“the expression of his face was changed”* – His countenance became harsh and flushed with anger.¹
- He had the furnace heated to seven times its usual temperature and called on a number of particularly strong men to take hold of and bind the three.²

¹ Miller, Stephen R., Daniel, vol. 18, *The New American Commentary* (p. 121)

² Storms, Sam; *Daniel, Biblical Studies*; (2016)

^{3:19} 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. ²⁰ And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.” (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar has decided to take no chances.
- If the God of the Jews was going to intervene and save these men, Nebuchadnezzar was determined to **thwart** him at every turn.
- Perhaps a fire at **ordinary** heat would have been no match for the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but **surely** this **excessive** heat will keep him at bay!
- Perhaps it was in the divine plan to rescue these men, but **surely** this phalanx of burly henchmen would be able to **foil** any such rescue attempt.

3:21 Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. 22 Because the king's order was **urgent** and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. (ESV)

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were tied up while still wearing their clothing and thrown into the flames.
- Their clothing would have rapidly caught fire and engulfed the three in flames – a horrifying spectacle.
- The king's "*urgent*" command forced the soldiers to carry out their task so hurriedly that they did not have time to protect **themselves** from the fire.
- When they threw the victims into the furnace, the extreme heat killed them.

3:21 Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. 22 Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. (ESV)

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego “*fell bound into*” the furnace, language that suggests they were thrown in through an opening at the top.
- Furnaces of this kind would have had an opening at the top and at the side.
- The furnace may have been built on the side of a small hill or man-made mound of earth, enabling the soldiers to walk to the **top** and throw the three Hebrews into it.
- Later Nebuchadnezzar would be able to look into the opening on the **side** and **observe** the three in the fire.

The Deliverance (3:24-27)

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.”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.”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,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. (NIV)

3:24 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.” (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar had been prepared to watch Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego disintegrate in the flames, but he was *not* prepared for what he *actually* saw.
- It says that the king “*was astonished*” by what he saw, causing him to jump to his feet.
- Unable to believe his eyes, the king asked his advisers if they had really thrown only “*three*” men into the fire.
- They assured the monarch that his memory was accurate.

3:25 *He answered and said, "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.**"* (ESV)

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been thrown into the fire bound, but now their ropes had evidently burned away and they were alive and walking around in the flames.
- But what **astonished** Nebuchadnezzar was that now the three Jews had been joined by a **fourth** man who he says here is "*like a son of the gods.*"
- An offspring (or "*son*") of the "*gods*" would **himself** be divine.
- In other words, the king believed that he had seen a god or superhuman being (i.e. angel) walking around in the flames with the Daniel's three friends.

3:25 *He answered and said, “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.”* (ESV)

- The KJV renders this phrase “*the Son of God*,” which indicates that the KJV translators thought this fourth man was, in fact, the second person of the Trinity.
- This was a popular belief among the early church fathers as well, but this way of translating the phrase doesn’t really seem to fit the context here.
- In Aramaic, the plural noun translated “*gods*” here can be rendered as a *plural*, “*gods*,” *or* as a *singular*, “*God*” when denoting the true God.
- In this context, since Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan polytheist who had no concept of the Christian Trinity, I think it’s better to translate it “*gods*” as the ESV and most other modern translations have done.
- While it’s *possible* this fourth man in the fire was a Christophany of some kind, in the absence of any compelling evidence, I think it’s more *likely* that he is an *angel* (as he is called by Nebuchadnezzar in vs. 28) sent by God, much like the angel God sent to close the mouth of the lion in Daniel 6:22.

3:26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of *the Most High God*, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. (ESV)

- Probably in order to get a better look and so that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could hear him, Nebuchadnezzar came near the opening of the furnace and shouted for the Hebrews to come out of the fire and appear before him.
- The king was now convinced that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was truly great, "*the Most High God*."
- Yet this faith in Yahweh was well within the scope of pagan, polytheistic religious beliefs, for the king merely considered Yahweh a great God (at least for the present) among many gods.

3:27 *And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.* (ESV)

- When the three came out of the fire, the other officials crowded around to examine them.
- There was **no** evidence that the three men had been in the furnace, for their bodies had not been burned – “*the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men*”
- Their hair was not singed, “*their cloaks were not harmed*,” and there was not even any “*smell of fire*” on them.
- All were convinced that they had witnessed a miracle.

The Result (3:28-30)

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.

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.”

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. (NIV)

3:28 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his *angel* and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. (ESV)

- Nebuchadnezzar praised the God of the Hebrews for such a great demonstration of his power.
- The king also was quite impressed with the fact that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had placed their trust in their God, and that their God had "*sent his angel*" to deliver them.
- In this context "*angel*" refers to a divine being as we talked about in vs. 25.
- Then the pagan monarch expressed his **admiration** for these young men because of their willingness to defy a king's command and suffer a horrible death in order to remain true to their god.
- Although initially **angered** by their actions, he **now respected** their commitment.
- Even in **today's** world unbelievers may not understand or appreciate Christian convictions, but usually they **respect** those who are willing to take a stand for their God.

3:29 *Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.*" (ESV)

- Here Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree forbidding all subjects throughout his kingdom from impugning Israel's God on penalty of death and destruction of their property ("*shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins*").
- The reason for the decree was that "*no other god who is able to rescue in this way.*"
- Such a command coming from the lips of a heathen king is **astounding**, but consider the circumstances:
- Nebuchadnezzar had just witnessed a **miracle**.
- This decree may also have been an attempt on his part to **appease** the God of Israel, for the king had **mistreated** Yahweh's followers and actually **challenged** his power.
- Nebuchadnezzar **may** have even feared that he was in danger of divine **retaliation**.

3:30 *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*
(ESV)

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not only **honored** by the king but they received **rewards**.
- Probably material rewards and respect among the people were involved as well as a job promotion.
- Thus, faithfulness in a dreadful trial resulted in great blessing for the three Jewish men.
- Such a lesson is an encouragement for modern-day believers when they encounter trying situations.
- The angel Gabriel told Mary, “*For nothing will be impossible with God*” (Luke 1:37), and Jesus said, “*with God all things are possible.*” (Matt 19:26).
- Daniel 3 illustrates the reality of these Scriptures.

Class Discussion Time

- We saw in today's text that Daniel's three friends did not doubt the power of their God to deliver them from the king's furnace.
- But at the same time, they realized that they had no right to ***presume*** that He would do so.
- Is there a lesson we can learn from their attitude in this situation?
- If so, what is it?

Class Discussion Time

- Furthermore, we saw that, had these young men **not** been delivered from the fiery furnace, they would **not** have regarded their deaths to have been the result of a ***lack of faith*** on their part.
- In their utter dependence on God's will, their faith did ***indeed*** quench the flames (Heb 11:34).
- But the writer of Hebrews tells us that others who had a ***similar*** faith "**were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword...**" (Heb 11:35–37).
- What lesson can we draw from the contrast that the writer of Hebrews draws between two very different outcomes for people having similar faith?

Class Discussion Time

- What did you think about my conclusion that the fourth man that Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fire was **not** the second person of the Trinity as suggested by the KJV, but that he was an angel sent by God to aid and comfort Daniel's three friends in their trial?
- What reasons would you give in support of your view?
- I made an observation today that even in today's world unbelievers may not understand or appreciate Christian convictions, but usually they respect those who are willing to take a stand for their God.
- Have you seen examples of this in your own life, or perhaps in the life of another Christian with whom you are acquainted?