

Daniel Chapter Three

Whilst Daniel 3 is *historical* in character, it contains a clear *prophetic* picture of events during the Great Tribulation. Nebuchadnezzar represents the coming 'man of sin' who will claim worship as God (2 Thessalonians 2.4). This involves paying homage to the 'abomination of desolation', an image which will be reared in the 'holy place' of the temple in Jerusalem (Matthew 24.15). The image will be energised by the false prophet (Revelation 13.15). Likewise, refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image was punishable by the burning fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego represent the faithful Jewish remnant who will refuse to worship the beast or his image (Revelation 20.4). Such a remnant will be preserved *through* the 'fiery trial' of the tribulation (cf. Zechariah 13.9). The chapter also provides *practical* encouragement in relation to the 'fiery' (painful) trials experienced by every believer (1 Peter 4.12-16).

The Challenge to Faith [vv.1-7]

v.1: Though the Septuagint dates this chapter as the eighteenth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, it is likely much earlier (see chart). The creation of the golden image was probably conceived from the king's dream in Daniel 2 and provided an excellent test of loyalty to his new administration. The image made in the form of a man (2.31-33) and was 60 cubits (90ft) high and 6 cubits (9ft) wide. The height may include a brick-built pedestal, remains of which (45ft square, 20ft high) have been excavated on a large plain 12 miles south-east of the ancient city of Babylon. The plain of 'Dura' (meaning 'fortification' and referring to anything enclosed by a wall) recalls another plain where the tower of Babel was built in defiance of God (Genesis 11.2). The image was overlaid with gold and represented the kingdom of Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar as the head of state (2.38). It was a definite statement of rebellion against God, as it suggested his kingdom of gold was *everlasting* (hence the *whole* image, not merely the head) and could never be replaced by anything 'inferior' (2.39). **v.2:** Nebuchadnezzar's empire was cosmopolitan and allowed conquered nations to retain their culture and religion. Thus, the image provided a way to unite the kingdom. It is generally a dangerous time for Christians where there is a uniting of religion and state. Those who do not conform will have to be removed! All the leading officials of the kingdom were summoned to the dedication of the image including the 'rulers of the provinces' of which Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were part (cf. 2.49). Note. Daniel's absence is likely explained by the fact he had been made responsible for the administration of the *city* of Babylon. The plain of Dura was beyond his jurisdiction. Thus, these young men would now have to stand alone. They had faithfully supported Daniel's exercise and followed his godly example (1.8; 2.17-18), but now they must stand firm in their own convictions. Sadly, Joash only did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the high priest. After his death he became an idolater (2 Kings 12.2; 2 Chronicles 24.17-18). When the godly leadership of the local assembly has passed on, do we have the strong personal faith and biblical convictions and to stand for truth?

v.5: The Babylonians seemed to have a music crazed culture (Psalm 137.3; Isaiah 14.11) incorporating the 'cornet' (horn), 'flute' (or pipe), 'harp' (zither), 'sackbut' (lyre), 'psaltery' (harp) and 'dulcimer' (bagpipe) in their worship. The association of 'all kinds of music' with idol worship should come as no surprise. Music is sensual and stirs the emotions. In the NT dispensation, believers worship by the Spirit of God, singing and making melody to the Lord in their hearts (Ephesians 5.19). Ironside once remarked to a friend about the Lord's Supper: *Each heart that was occupied with Christ was like a stringed instrument touched by His own blessed hand; and He, the chief singer on the stringed instruments, was there in our midst, leading out our hearts in worship and praise to the Father.* **v.6:** Any non-conformists were threatened with the 'burning fiery furnace' (cf. Jeremiah 29.22). This was like a common brick-kiln or smelting furnace and was set in the hillside surrounding the plain. Steps would lead to a large opening at the top where fuel (ore) was injected. A window at ground level could be used to add further fuel or remove the finished products. Temperatures in these kilns could easily reach 1000°C. The people therefore bowed out of *fear* (not love); they bowed because they had to, not because they wanted to – the fear of religious superstition. Thank God we bow to Christ because our hearts are won to Him. **v.7:** Most people in the ancient Near East were polytheists used to acknowledging many deities. Such a simple act of prostration was of no consequence, but impossible for the faithful believer in God. Idolatry is still rife in our society. Today it is not so much *external* as *internal*. People spend their lives bowing down at the altar of self, money, pleasure, sex, romance, amusement, sport, education and family. Covetousness is idolatry (3.5). What do we worship? What do we idolise? What do we honour with time, energy and money over and above Christ?

The Criticism of Faith [vv.8-15]

v.8: The 'Chaldeans' quickly noticed the non-conformity of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These were the leading group of Nebuchadnezzar's 'wise men' and the same individuals who owed their lives to Daniel (2.24). The word 'accused' literally means 'to eat the pieces of', as an animal would tear pieces of flesh from a carcass. Perhaps they had been waiting for such an opportunity to victimise those of whom they were most envious (cf. v.12). We should not be

surprised at the hatred of the world. It hated Christ; it hates those who stand for Him and His truth (John 15.18). **v.12:** The Chaldeans clearly resented the promotion of these young Jews. Beware of envy – the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing the prosperity of others. It is as ‘rotteness of the bones’ (Proverbs 14.30). In emphasising the Hebrews’ disobedience, they hoped to gain some favour with the king. **v.13:** In a fit of ‘rage’ and ‘fury’ the command was made to bring the offenders before Nebuchadnezzar. The world desires conformity to itself at all costs (Romans 12.2). **v.14:** The phrase ‘Is it true?’ could well be rendered ‘Is it of purpose?’, i.e. was there some justification for their actions? Had they misunderstood the directive of the herald? **v.15:** It is almost as if Nebuchadnezzar arranges a second, special sounding of the music at which they could bow. In his fury, Nebuchadnezzar betrays the true issue at hand. ‘What at all god is there that shall deliver you?’ This is not an issue of king versus subjects, but the gods of Babylon (represented in the image) and the unseen God of the Hebrews (Jim Allen).

The Confession of Faith [vv.16-18]

v.16: The faith of the Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is to be admired. Under *physical* pressure (fiery furnace), *political* pressure (presence of the king), *peer* pressure (everyone else had done it) and *psychological* pressure (it was so easy to do) they would not bow. There would be no compromise of the word of God! ‘We are not careful to answer thee in this matter’, i.e. we have no defence, apology or explanation to make. The charge was true. **v.17:** In a tremendous statement of faith, they recognised the ability of the true God to deliver them from the fire *and* hand of the king, ‘but if not’... (**v.18**). God *could*, but not necessarily *would* deliver them. God could keep them *out* of the fire but may will to take them *in* and preserve them *through* the fire! This is a principle by which the believer should live. Our God is able to deliver us *from* any ‘fiery trial’, but it may be His will to take us *into* and *through* it. God allowed Herod to kill James with the sword, yet he miraculously released Peter from prison (Acts 12). *Romans 11.33: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* Though Peter commands to ‘submit to the king as supreme’ (1 Peter 2), **if** a government forbids what God commands, or commands what God forbids, then ‘we must obey God rather than men’ **but** be willing submit to judicial consequences. They therefore yielded themselves unconditionally to the will and word of God. They loved Him more than life itself. *You can tell the brother or sister that would die for the Lord; because they are living for the Lord.*

The Crucible of Faith [vv.19-23] and Companion of Faith [vv.24-25]

v.19: ‘Seven times more’ is a hyperbolic expression meaning ‘as hot as possible’. Thank God, the divine Refiner sits in full temperature control of any fiery trial (1 Corinthians 10.13). Having been bound by the ‘most mighty men’ (**v.20**) they were cast, fully clothed into the midst of the ‘burning fiery furnace’ (**v.22**). *I saw the martyr at the stake, the flames could not his courage shake, nor death his soul appal. I asked him whence his strength was given, he looked triumphantly to heaven and answered, Christ is all.* Though the fiery trial may be brought by the devil (e.g. persecution) the divine Refiner is able to use the heat to perfect the valuable silver or gold (cf. Zechariah 13.9). He is looking for His own reflection! **v.24:** In ‘astonishment’ (terror) Nebuchadnezzar could hardly believe his eyes. Another joined the Hebrews in the fire. **v.25:** Nebuchadnezzar describes the *fourth* as ‘like the Son of God’, literally, ‘one like a son of the gods (plural)’ or ‘a son of deity’ whom he further describes as ‘His angel’ (**v.28**). *Spurgeon: Even the heathen eyes of Nebuchadnezzar could discern a supernatural lustre about him.* This is clearly a pre-incarnate manifestation of the Son of God, one who knows well the fire (Lamentations 1.13). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would no doubt have known the writings of Isaiah, and could repose in its truth. *Isaiah 43.2: When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned.* Note. The trial manifested the Lord. They met Him in the fire! Christian convictions might be costly, but what is gained through the companionship of Christ will be a more than abundant compensation.

The Compliment of Faith [vv.26-30]

v.26: The ‘coming forth’ of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is a prophetic foreshadow of 12.1. **v.27:** The faith of these men acted as a great testimony to all who gathered. Note their complete salvation. There was no evidence of the fire upon them at all. We are reminded of the fulness of eternal salvation in Christ – the marks of sin and the devil will forever be removed in eternity. **v.28:** Nebuchadnezzar blesses the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego for ‘delivering’ His servants. He is not abandoning polytheism but placing this God ‘on top of the pile’ (cf. v.26). But praise is also reserved for the Hebrews – even being commended for ‘violating’ (changing) the king’s edict and ‘yielding’ their bodies in total devotion, even unto death, to their God. He was worthy of their ultimate sacrifice, not out of fear but love. *Romans 12.1: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.* **v.29:** Nebuchadnezzar commands that respect be offered for such a God who can deliver in this manner. Judaism was now to be permitted amongst the other religions of Babylon – a decree that was no doubt used of God for the physical preservation of the nation of Israel during the years of captivity (Jim Allen). **v.30:** The worst fears of the Chaldeans had come to pass! They had sought the *demotion not promotion* of these young Hebrew men! The word ‘promoted’ literally means ‘caused them to prosper’ whether materially, socially or professionally (Romans 11.35).