

CAPITOL STUDIES

JANUARY 31, 2024 • WEEK 4



DANIEL: CHRIST'S CIVIL SERVANT IN BABYLON

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Verse of the Week

Daniel 3:17-18

If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

Condemnation of Babylon's Civil Servants



IN THE BIBLE, “Babylon” is more than a city or an empire; it represents a system. It is God’s name for Satan’s system in this world. Babylon started in Genesis 10:10. It was the work of Nimrod, that “mighty rebel against the Lord.” In Genesis 11, we see Babel in its rebellion against God, a human attempt at worldwide unity, politically and religiously. This is what Nebuchadnezzar wanted to accomplish with his great image; he wanted to unify his kingdom under one government and one religion. The whole scheme was man-centered; there was no place for God. It was all built around gold. This whole Babylonian system is Satan’s counterfeit religion. It opposes God’s truth, seeking to capture the hearts, minds, and bodies of people.

Actually, the name “bab-el” means “the gate of God.” It pretends to be the way to heaven. In truth, it is the way to hell. We see the final development of this false system in Revelation 17–18.

Pastor Arin Hess, *Chaplain, Capitol Studies*



INTRODUCTION

In those chapters of Revelation, the material, cultural, and religious systems of the world are all united in a one world federation. God will permit this “one world” system to grow, and then He will destroy it once for all. It is important to recognize the difference between God’s truth and Satan’s lies, between true Christianity and Satan’s false “religions.” True believers are not to be a part of this worldly system (Revelation 18:4–5). Like the three Hebrew men, we must take our stand against Babylon and bear witness to the truth of God’s Word.¹

A moment of crisis. A football team was in the throes of a difficult game. Someone yelled, “Give Leroy the ball, Give Leroy the ball!” Leroy yelled back just as vehemently, “Leroy don’t want the ball!” In some ways that is exactly the way it is with God’s people. Often, we do not want the challenges and responsibilities that go with being a born-again Christian and serving the Lord. Daniel and his three friends often found their faith tested in extreme ways. How do we respond when God allows difficult testing to come into our lives as well?

I. NEBUCHADNEZZAR’S DECREE

A. He Constructs an Image

Daniel 3:1-3

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ²Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. ³Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.²

This chapter opens with the account of the building of the great golden image in the plain of Dura (a few miles from Babylon). It was covered with gold, but inwardly it was just perishable wood. Man is much like this—outwardly, a great amount of show, but on the inside, empty, inferior, and corrupt. Possibly, the king’s decree to build this image was an afterthought after the dream (chapter 2) which had taken place about twenty years earlier. This great image was not only to glorify Nebuchadnezzar, but also to impress his subjects with his majesty, might, and magnificence. It would provide a visible record to generations to come of his greatness. Nebuchadnezzar was an absolute monarch who could demand as he wished, and no one dared refuse his summons. Every governmental officer was represented at the dedication with the exception of Daniel. The Bible does not give the reason. Perhaps he was representing the government outside of Babylon.



B. He Consolidated Worship

Daniel 3:4-7

Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, ⁵that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. ⁶But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire." ⁷Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Maybe Nebuchadnezzar thought to strengthen his empire by unifying religious worship. This great ceremony was pompous, universal, sensual, orderly, and compulsory. To defy the order was to court one's death in a hot furnace. "Nebuchadnezzar solidified his rule over the Babylonian Empire by requesting allegiance to the image. The ceremony may have included a loyalty oath. ...[A] polytheist would not have objected to such an oath or the worship of the victorious god. This same philosophy was later held by the Hitler Youth. Baldue von Schirach, its head, stated, 'One cannot be a good German and at the same time deny God, but an avowal of faith in the eternal Germany is at the same time an avowal of faith in the eternal God. For us, the service of Germany is the service of God.'"³

II. NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DISCOVERY

A. The Jews Are Accused

Daniel 3:8-12

For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. ⁹They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. ¹²There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."

It is clear that there were three exceptions to this universal obedience as Daniel's three friends refused to bow down. Evidently some of the Chaldeans were watching the Jews to see whether they would obey the king. When the three Jews failed to comply, the Chaldeans immediately went to the king and reported them. It was likely that the Chaldeans saw this as an opportunity to rid themselves of these foreign usurpers whose positions they felt rightfully belonged to true Babylonians. Probably they





had looked for an opportunity to destroy these Jews for some time. They went to remind the king of his decree and make three charges against the Jews: (1) They did not honor the king, (2) they would not worship the king's god, and (3) they would not worship the golden image.

B. The Jews Are Brought to Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 3:13-15

Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"

The king was furious about this as the accusers had hoped. The king considered this defiance a direct challenge to his authority, and this conduct was something he could not tolerate. Commanding the three Jews to be brought to him, he asked whether they understood the significance of what they had done. Because he had no reason to question their loyalty in the past, and because they were such useful and wise servants, he gave them the benefit of the doubt by inquiring whether they had misunderstood the meaning of his decree. He gave them a second chance to worship the image. If they disobeyed him, their death was certain, and no god could deliver them from his power. "He rightly recognized that their refusal was more than ordinary disobedience. It was a clash of beliefs, a confrontation between his god and theirs."⁴

C. The Jews Are Firm in Their Trust in God

Daniel 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

The witness of the three Jews was loud and clear, for they knew worshipping the image meant a denial of the true God of Israel and an infraction of the first commandment (Exodus 20:3-5). They were willing to pay any price which the king might impose upon them knowing that God could deliver them from the penalty decreed by the king if He so desired. Regardless, they would be true to God's will for their lives. Willing submission to God was their heart decision.



III. NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DISPOSITION

A. Nebuchadnezzar Was Furious

Daniel 3:19-23

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. ²¹Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. ²²For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. ²³But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.

The king commanded the furnace to be seven times hotter than necessary. It probably was the metal kiln used to make the image. The fire had to be at least 1850 degrees Fahrenheit to melt gold. So, the kiln had the potential to go beyond the heat needed to cremate a body. Perhaps pairs of steps led up the side of the furnace to the opening above. Carrying the three Jews to the top of the stairs and throwing them in the fire, these men would be scorched (evaporated) to death in the process.

B. Nebuchadnezzar Was Astonished

Daniel 3:24-26a

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." ²⁵He said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" ²⁶Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!"

The king was shocked to see four in the fire and one like a messenger from God. Robert Bell believes this was "Christ (God's Angel, 3:28) that walked" with the three men.⁵ They were no longer bound, but free and safe. God had proven his ability to deliver His faithful, committed civil servants. Nebuchadnezzar could not deny that the Jews had somehow been delivered by supernatural means, and so he called the men to come out, addressing them as "servants of the most high God." The king would have been a believer in polytheism. He admitted only that the God of the Jews was the greatest of all gods (henotheism). That was as far as he was willing to go. It did not destroy his belief in his other gods, nor did he trust in the Hebrews' God. However, the king did praise the God of the Jews, and he observed the Jews' trust in God who had delivered





them and saw them completely yield their bodies to God, although it might have cost them their lives.

Daniel 3:26b-27

Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. ²⁷The satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them.

Having come out of the fire, the Jews were examined by the government officials. Here was the manifestation of the great miracle—nothing was burned; there was no smell of fire on them; their clothing showed no effects of the flames! God indeed wrought a mighty miracle. Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and admonished. He saw a visual example of Isaiah's prophecy: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; ...Since you are precious in My sight, Since you are honored, and I love you" (Isaiah 43:1-4). By faith, these three "quenched the power of fire" (Hebrews 11:34).

C. Nebuchadnezzar Had to Acknowledge the God of the Jews

Daniel 3:28-30

Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." ³⁰Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

Now the king issued a different decree. Any insult against the Hebrews or their God would be rewarded with death. While the king did not repent, at least he admired a God who could deliver. God allowed the three Hebrews to be promoted to even higher service in the province of Babylon.⁵

CONCLUSION

"Why is there so much hatred today toward those who live godly? Why, in our world of tolerance, is there so much intolerance toward those who stand with the living God of the Bible? Both the Hebrews that took a stand in ancient Babylon and those who take a stand in our Babylon-like world today will be hated in a culture that is hostile towards God. Our identification with Jesus Christ will always carry a negative response for



many.”⁶ God will honor the Jewish people in a time to come. He has great plans for the survival of the Jews during the Great Tribulation here on the earth. They will be His miracle people.

Things we must remember:

1. God’s commands must take precedence over the dictates of the state.
2. God is sovereign—whether the result is triumph or seeming tragedy.
3. Suffering is a part of life and is necessary—whether seen as fair or unfair.
4. Deliverance is impressive—whether seen by the godly or ungodly.
5. When God takes us through suffering, He **uses us** to exalt His name!⁷

Pastor Arin Hess

FOOTNOTES

1. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament*, Victor Books, 1993.
2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.
3. As quoted in *The Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, Vol. 121, 1937, p. 154, in Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Book of Daniel*, Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, TX, 2023, p.127.
4. J. Phillips, *Exploring the Book of Daniel: An Expository Commentary*, Daniel 3:13-15, Kregel Publications, 2009.
5. Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books*, Bob Jones University Press, 2010, p. 361.
6. Hummel Rand, *The Daniel Dilemma: Real Courage for Real Life*, JourneyForth Books, Greenville, SC, 2016, p. 62.
7. Some of this material is taken from Edward Watke, Jr., *Study of the Book of Daniel*, Revival in the Home Ministries, Augusta, GA, 1992.



