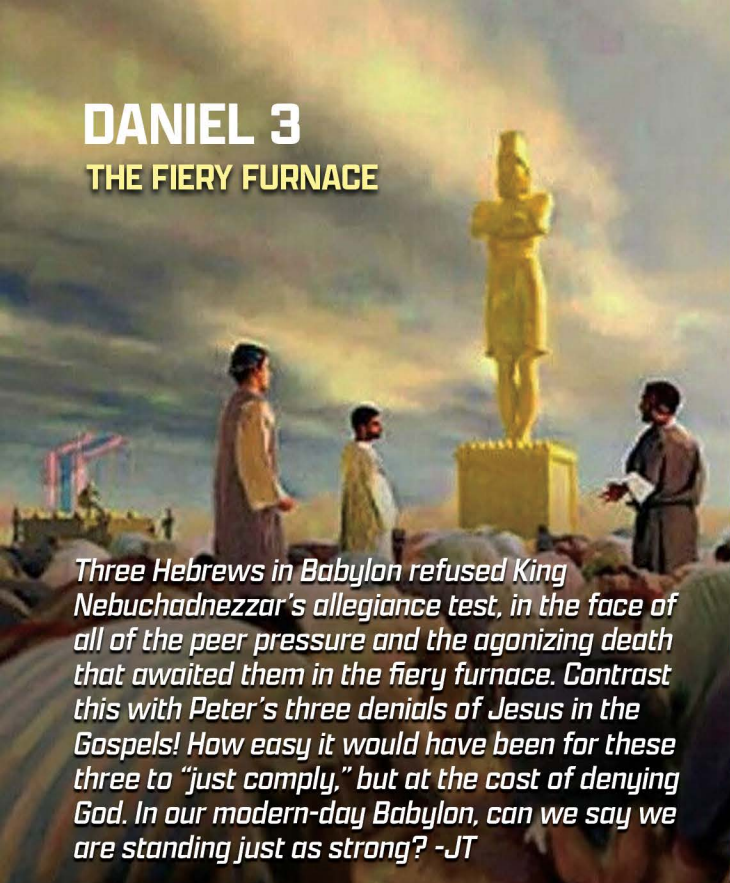


DANIEL 3

THE FIERY FURNACE



Three Hebrews in Babylon refused King Nebuchadnezzar's allegiance test, in the face of all of the peer pressure and the agonizing death that awaited them in the fiery furnace. Contrast this with Peter's three denials of Jesus in the Gospels! How easy it would have been for these three to "just comply," but at the cost of denying God. In our modern-day Babylon, can we say we are standing just as strong? -JT

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits [90 feet] high and six cubits [9 feet] wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. **2** He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. **3** So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: **5** As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. **6** Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of

the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. **9** They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! **10** Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, **11** and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. **12** But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

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, pipe 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 him, "King 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 deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. **18** But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

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 usual **20** 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.

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, Your Majesty."

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.

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.

Study Guide BlueLetterBible.org Commentary

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold: There is considerable debate regarding when this happened. Some think it was a short time after the events of Daniel 2, but others think it happened many years later.

There is a discernible link between Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 and the image he made in Daniel 3. It seems that Nebuchadnezzar deliberately made an entire statue of gold, to say that the day of his reign and authority would never end — in contradiction to God's declared plan.

An image of gold: The image was more like a stylized obelisk rather than a normal statue, being 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. Being so large, it is safe to say that it was not made of solid gold but probably wood overlaid with gold. This was a common method of construction in the ancient world.

"On the plains of Dura there stands today, a rectilinear mound, about twenty feet high, an exact square of about forty-six feet at the base, resembling the pedestal of a colossal statue." (Heslop)

All the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image: The demand that all come to the dedication ceremony means that Nebuchadnezzar meant to use the worship of this image as a test of allegiance.

The use of the Aramaic words for **lyre**, **psaltery** and **symphony** has led some critics to say that the Book of Daniel was written hundreds of years after the time of Daniel. They say this because these particular words are Aramaic words borrowed from Greek words and supposedly Daniel did not have these words at his disposal in the sixth century B.C., and they supposedly did not come into the Hebrew vocabulary until the third century B.C.

Nevertheless, ancient records tell us there were Greeks in the region of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia as far back as the *eighth* century B.C. Archaeology also proves beyond a doubt that Greek mercenaries fought and made military settlements in and around Judea *before* the time of Daniel.

A burning fiery furnace: Nebuchadnezzar was not a man who allowed lawbreakers to go unpunished. In an ancient cuneiform writing, Nebuchadnezzar was described as so devoted to justice that "he did not rest night or day." The document also tells of a criminal guilty of a second offense who was decapitated, and afterwards a stone image of his head was displayed as a warning.

God can deliver us **from** a trial,
or He can miraculously sustain
and strengthen us **in** a trial.

They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image: Apparently their failure to worship the image was not discovered until these certain Chaldeans made it known. With so many thousands of government officials in attendance, it would be easy to overlook these three. Additionally, we see from this that the three Jewish men did not lodge a formal protest; they simply refrained from sharing in the sin of idolatry themselves.

It is one thing to make a stand for God; it is a greater thing to stick to your stand when pointedly asked, "**Is it true?**" Peter followed Jesus after His arrest, but he wilted and denied Jesus when asked, "**Is it true?**"

But if not: In this, the Jewish men show they had a good understanding and appreciation of *submission* to God. They knew God's power, but they also knew that they must do what was right even if God did not do what they expect or hope Him to do. We often complain about our rights and what is fair. Often it is better to make a stand and endure our difficulty, leaving our fate in God's hands.

I see four men loose... and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God: Nebuchadnezzar tells us who the fourth person was — the Son of God. Jesus was literally with them in the worst of their trial.

We don't know if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego *knew* that 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.

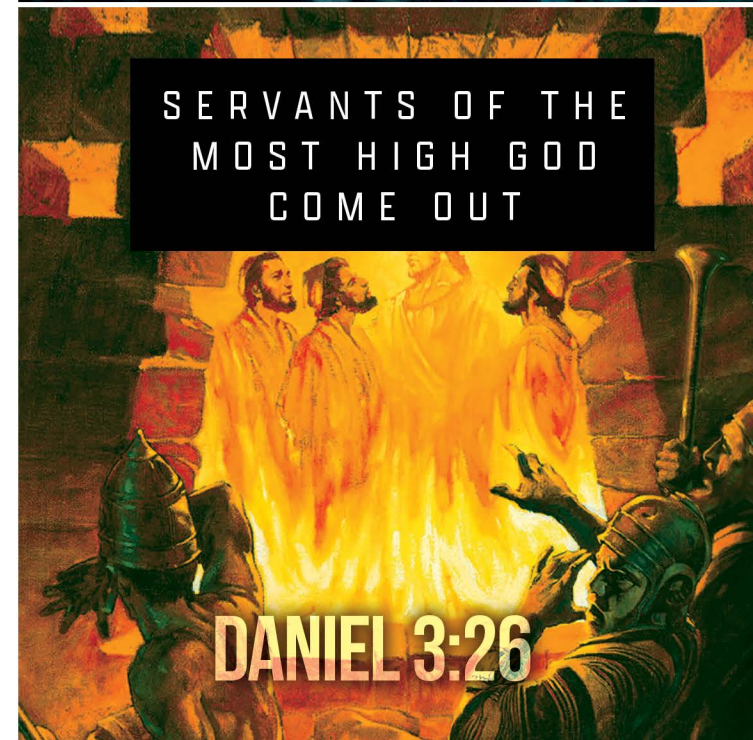
God can deliver us *from* a trial, or He can miraculously sustain and strengthen us *in* a trial. Trapp quotes an English martyr who said this as he was burnt at the stake: "O ye Papists, behold ye look for miracles; here now you may see a miracle; for in this fire I feel no more pain than as if I were in a bed of down; but it is to me as a bed of roses."

Yielded their bodies: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego surrendered themselves completely to God — body, soul, and spirit. It was the kind of submission Paul wrote of in Romans 12:1: present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

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