

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S GOLDEN IMAGE

TEXT: DANIEL 3:1-30

INTRODUCTION:

1. The account of the golden image which was erected on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon, records King Nebuchadnezzar's reaction to the revelation of chapter 2 in which he was symbolized by the head of gold (3:1).
2. The events in chapter 3 take place about 20 years after the events of chapter 2.
3. Rather than humbling King Nebuchadnezzar, the dream and its interpretation by Daniel seems to have made him prouder. He hardened his heart toward the things of God.
4. The astounding courage and deliverance of Daniel's companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who refused to worship the image, has inspired the people of God in similar times of trial.
5. Daniel himself is not mentioned in this chapter. More than likely he was out of town when this happened.

I. THE GOLDEN IMAGE (3:1-7)

1. Daniel 3:12 says Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were "set over the affairs of the province of Babylon" by King Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 2:49).
2. Therefore we know the events of Daniel 3 were subsequent to the conclusion of chapter 2. Some Bible teachers say the golden image was erected about 20 years after the events of chapter 2.
3. The exact date however, is uncertain.
4. The image of gold is described as being sixty cubits (90 ft.) high and six cubits (9 ft.) broad. A cubit is approximately eighteen inches.
5. The number six is prominent, pointing to the future image of the beast. Revelation 13:18 says the beast's "number is Six hundred threescore and six."
6. Everything about King Nebuchadnezzar's image prefigures the coming antichrist.
 - Rebellion against God. Exodus 20:4 says, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image."
 - Pride and self-deification (cf. 5:18-20). Second Thessalonians 2:4 says the antichrist will exalt himself "above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so

that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

- Unifying of worship (Daniel 3:6). Revelation 13:15 says, "as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed."
 - Revelation 20:4 says those who will not worship the beast, or his image, and will refuse to receive his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands, will be beheaded.
7. While an image of this size was unusual, it was not unique. For example, the Colossus at Rhodes was even bigger -- seventy cubits high. Standing in the entrance of the harbor in Rhodes, it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world -- a colossal bronze statue dedicated to the Greek god Helios. The statue was so large that ships in full sail could pass between its legs.
 8. It is probable that the image was made of wood overlaid with gold. For example, the "golden altar" in the tabernacle was actually wood overlaid with gold (Exodus 37:25, 26), but it is referred to in Exodus 39:38 as the "golden altar."
 9. The use of the golden metal for the image may have been derived from Daniel's interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2, when Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou art this head of gold" (2:38).
 10. After the golden image was set up, King Nebuchadnezzar organized a big dedication ceremony (3:2, 3).
 11. After everyone was assembled, an herald announced that as soon as the music started playing, all were commanded to fall down and worship the image (3:4, 5).
 12. This was a special performance by the "Chaldean Philharmonic Orchestra" (3:5). The Babylonians were known to be music lovers.
 13. The Psalmist wrote, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137:1-4).
 14. King Nebuchadnezzar was wise to use instrumental music because music could stir the people's emotions and make it easier for him to manipulate them.

15. And whoever would not fall down and worship the image would be "cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace" (3:6). Jeremiah 29:22 refers to King Nebuchadnezzar roasting men named Zedekiah and Ahab in the fire.
16. No one wanted to be roasted in the fire, so they all obeyed and did as they were told (3:7).

II. THE THREE JEWS REFUSED TO WORSHIP THE IMAGE

1. More than likely, the Chaldeans were jealous and resentful of the Jews, and this jealousy is behind their accusations (3:8-12).
2. They saw in the fact that the Jews had not worshiped the image an occasion to bring accusation against them.
3. The Aramaic word translated "accused" literally means, "to devour piecemeal," a graphic expression meaning, "to slander with malicious accusations which devours the accused piece by piece" (Walvoord).
4. The Chaldeans made three charges against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. First, they were accused of showing no regard for the king. Second, they did not serve the gods of the king. Third, they did not worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar had set up (3:12).
5. The first accusation was not true. There was no evidence that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had been disloyal in any way. But the Chaldeans resented them because they were Jews and they were foreigners.
6. The second and third accusations were more than just a religious disagreement. To the Chaldeans this was a political issue as well. In their minds, these foreign Jews were not good, patriotic Babylonians.
17. John Walvoord said, "The arguments were calculated to arouse the anger of Nebuchadnezzar and to bring about the downfall of these three men with the possibility that the Chaldeans themselves might be given greater authority in political affairs" (*Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*).
18. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were brought before King Nebuchadnezzar and politely told him they would not serve his gods, nor worship the golden image (3:13-18).
19. It is interesting that King Nebuchadnezzar adds the challenging question, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" (3:15). In chapter 2, King Nebuchadnezzar was happy to acknowledge the superiority of the God of the Hebrews over the Babylonian gods in interpreting his dream, but now he cannot bring

- himself to believe that the God of the Jews would be able in these circumstances to deliver these three men from his hand.
20. King Nebuchadnezzar was still very proud. The LORD dealt with his pride in chapter 4 (cf. 4:30, 31).
 21. Rabshakeh made a similar blasphemous claim when threatening King Hezekiah (Isaiah 36:13-20).
 22. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "We are not careful (needful, i.e. there is no need to answer you) to answer thee in this matter" (3:16).
 23. Their answer may seem disrespectful to the king, but it wasn't. They meant they could not in good conscience obey his command.
 24. They declared that their God was able to deliver them from the burning fiery furnace (3:17). They not only affirmed that their God was able but that He would deliver them (3:17b).
 25. "But if not..." (3:18) does not suggest that God could not deliver them, but whether or not He chose to deliver them.
 26. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego considered the alternative that God might choose not to deliver them. They took into consideration that sometimes it is not in the purpose of God to deliver faithful believers from martyrdom. John the Baptist was beheaded. Stephen was stoned to death. All of the original apostles, except the apostle John, were martyred.
 27. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego boldly declared that even if God would not deliver them, they would still refuse to worship the gods of Babylon as well as the golden image (3:18).
 28. Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15).
 29. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were then cast into the burning fiery furnace (3:19-23).
 30. King Nebuchadnezzar was "full of fury" (3:19). In his pride and anger, he gave the foolish order to heat the furnace seven times hotter than usual, as if this would increase the torment (3:19).
 31. Actually, a slow fire would have been far more torturous. Geoffrey King said, "And then he lost his temper!...His furnace was hot, but he himself got hotter! And when a man gets full of fury, he gets full of folly. There is no fool on earth like a man who has lost his temper. And Nebuchadnezzar did a stupid thing. He ought to have cooled the furnace seven times *less* if he had wanted to hurt them; but instead of that in his fury he heated it seven times *more*" (*Daniel*).
 32. Because of his foolish command to increase the heat, King Nebuchadnezzar lost his "most mighty men" (3:20-22).

III. THE MEN ARE DELIVERED FROM THE FIRE.

1. Verse 24 says, "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished (astonished)..."
2. Hebrews 11:34 says, "by faith they... quenched the violence of fire."
3. Nebuchadnezzar could not believe his eyes and in his excitement he stood up and asked his counsellors whether the three men had not been cast bound into the midst of the fire (3:24).
4. Instead of three men, King Nebuchadnezzar saw four men; and instead of being bound, they were free; and instead of writhing in anguish in the flames, they were walking about in the fire and making no attempt to come out (3:25).
5. And most amazing of all, King Nebuchadnezzar said, "And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (3:25b).
6. It was immediately apparent to King Nebuchadnezzar, as well as the others who were watching, that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego was the true God of heaven, and He was greater than the gods of Babylon.
7. King Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego was "the most high God" (3:26-28).
8. The hair of their heads had not been singed, their coats in which they had been bound had not changed, and not even the smell of fire was on them (3:27).
9. John Walvoord said, "Just as the reign of Nebuchadnezzar is symbolic of the entire period of the times of the Gentiles, so the deliverance of Daniel's three companions is typical of the deliverance of Israel during the period of Gentile domination. Particularly at the end of the Gentile period Israel will be in fiery affliction, but as Isaiah prophesied, 'But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee' (Isaiah 43:1, 2)" (*Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation*; cf. *Scofield Bible*, p. 903 bottom).
10. King Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree, commemorating the miraculous event. He recognized the power of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, "who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him" (3:28).

11. The Babylonians believed that their heathen gods sent messengers to deliver those in danger and to accomplish their purpose. King Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation should be understood in this way.
12. The pre-incarnate Christ delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from the burning fiery furnace, but King Nebuchadnezzar had little comprehension of this.
13. King Nebuchadnezzar not only recognized the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, he also commended them for their trust in God (3:28).
14. Nebuchadnezzar "recognized the superior obligation of the men not to worship any deity except their own. This was a remarkable admission for a king in Nebuchadnezzar's situation" (Walvoord).
15. King Nebuchadnezzar then made his decree. He officially recognized the power of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and he called upon all the people in his realm not to say anything amiss concerning this God at the threat of being cut to pieces and their houses made a dunghill (3:29).
16. Like at the conclusion of chapter 2, it is clear that though Nebuchadnezzar had been greatly impressed, he had not yet been brought to the place where he was willing to put his trust in the true God of Israel. He still wasn't saved.
17. In Mark 12:34, the Lord Jesus said to a scribe, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." At this point, King Nebuchadnezzar was not far from the kingdom of God. Chapter 4 describes King Nebuchadnezzar's conversion.
18. King Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (3:30). In this verse we see them for the last time, and no further reference is made to them.

CONCLUSION:

1. It is interesting that in Daniel 3:28 King Nebuchadnezzar says Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego "yielded their bodies."
2. Romans 12:1, 2 says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present (yield) your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."
3. The Lord wants believers like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who are yielded, surrendered, and separated!

*I saw the martyr at the stake,
The flames could not his courage shake,
Nor death his soul appall.
I asked him whence his strength was given,
He looked triumphantly to heaven,
And answered, Christ is all! -- W. A. Williams*