

Lesson 8

Last week we finished Chapter 2, which is one the great chapters of the Bible. That chapter sets the stage for some of the more difficult chapters to follow in this book, as more is later revealed to Daniel about the kingdoms that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. Also, we looked last week at the stone that sweeps away the man-made kingdoms of this world, and we saw that that stone is the church, the eternal kingdom of Christ that was established in Acts 2 during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberius, just as Daniel had prophesied.

At the end of Chapter 2, we saw what happened to Daniel and his three prayer-partner friends. Daniel became a ruler over the province of Babylon and head over the wise men. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were set over the affairs of the province of Babylon. Once again, keep in mind that we are talking here about four Jewish teenagers.

So what happens next?

Chapter 3


In this chapter, we discover what it means to take a stand for God and what it means to stand against the gods of this world. We also learn more about Daniel's three friends, who are truly profiles in courage.

Two of the central themes of this book are on display in this chapter: the absolute sovereignty of God and God's unfailing love for his people.

The apocalyptic sections of Daniel will later portray these attributes of God with signs and symbols. In this chapter, we will see historical demonstrations of these attributes of God.

In Chapter 2, God made known his great wisdom. Here, God reveals his great power. The message to the people of Daniel's day is clear: in spite of present appearances, God is in control! And, of course, that is an important message for us as well.

Daniel 3:1

 1 Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the

breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Note first these events are not taking place in the city of Babylon itself. They are instead taking place in the plains of Dura, which was in the province of Babylon. We don't know for sure where Dura was, but it was likely southeast and nearby to the city of Babylon.

The king makes a giant golden image and sets it up before the people. Daniel does not tell us whether the image was of a god or of the king himself, and commentators differ on that question.

The gold of this statue links this event with the dream in Chapter 2 in which the king was the head of gold. Perhaps this link is a clue that the statue was an image of the king, but historians tell us that Mesopotamian kings rarely presented themselves as gods, and we have no other evidence that Nebuchadnezzar ever did so.

Also, if the king considered himself divine, then why did he build a statue of himself for people to worship when he was there in person to be worshiped? Perhaps the statue's likeness was of one of Babylon's gods such as their principal god, Marduk.

But with that said, I think we must admit that the similarity between this image and the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream seems to be more than just a coincidence.

Recall that Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold in his dream. If this image in Chapter 3 was of the king himself then it seems that Nebuchadnezzar was not satisfied with being just the head - he wanted to be the whole image! Out of all that Daniel told him, Nebuchadnezzar seems to have only remembered the statement "You are the head of gold." (We also have our favorite verses...)

Even if this image was of Nebuchadnezzar's god rather than of Nebuchadnezzar himself, I bet Nebuchadnezzar's god looked a bit like the king himself. And isn't that always the case? When men fashion their own gods, don't those false gods resemble their maker?

One thing is very clear from the first verse of Chapter 3 - it did not take long for Nebuchadnezzar to forget all of those newly found religious insights that we saw at the end of Chapter 2!

Why did Nebuchadnezzar build the image?

Maybe what we are seeing here is the great arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar, something we will see later in this book. Perhaps the king was saying to Daniel and to God, "OK. Here is the image. Now

where is your big stone?" Daniel's prediction that Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would be destroyed had probably not set too well with him.

Or perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's plan was simply to boost his own political power through the use of religion. Can we think of any modern-day examples of that? We said a moment ago that one characteristic of an idol is that it resembles its maker. Another characteristic of an idol is that it *serves* its maker, and I suspect we are seeing that here with this giant statue.

How large was the image? It was 60 cubits tall and 6 cubits wide. At 18 inches per cubit, that means the image was 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. The height is about the same as the date-palms that still grow in the plains of Iraq, and it was almost as slender, which means it looked more like an obelisk than a traditional statue. Rising to a height of roughly a nine-story building, and expanding to a width of nine feet, the statue was enormous.

Liberal critics see the size of the image as a problem. They claim that the odd proportions would have made the image look preposterous. But the colossus at Rhodes was 10 cubits taller. Also, perhaps the image was on top of a large pedestal. Evidence for such a base may have been discovered by the French archaeologist Oppert, who located the remains of a brick structure about four miles south of ancient Babylon that he believed was the pedestal of this colossal image.

The liberals also complain that there would not have been enough gold in all of Babylon to make such a large image, but where does the Bible say that the image was made of solid gold? Like smaller statues that have survived and like the idol described in Isaiah 40:19, this image was likely gold plated.

And, as with most of the liberal's arguments, this one can be turned around against them. The record of the construction of this large image is in fact more evidence that points to an early date for the writing of Daniel. Why?

Because archaeological discoveries have shown that Nebuchadnezzar was a religious reformer. Excavations have shown that when Nebuchadnezzar rebuilt religious temples, he removed the special rooms where the priests conducted their secret ceremonies and replaced them with areas where all could come and participate. And this seems to be what we see here in Daniel 3. Sir Leonard Wooley wrote the following:

What was there new in the king's act? Not the setting up of a statue, because each king in turn had done the same; the novelty was the command for general worship by the public: for a ritual

performed by priests the king is substituting a form of congregational worship which all his subjects are obliged to attend.

How did the author of Daniel know about this new phase of worship that began under Nebuchadnezzar if Daniel had been written 400 years later? If the author of this book lived under Greek rule as the liberals tell us, how did he know so much about ancient Babylon?

Daniel 3:2-3

2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. 3 Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Verses 2 and 3 set the stage for the events to follow, and it is a very impressive stage full of dignitaries who the king wants to impress. And we should keep that audience in mind as we move through the chapter.

Let's look more closely at the list of titles in verse 2. The KJV has "the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces." The RSV has "the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces."

The titles used in this section point to a very well-organized bureaucracy.

- Satrap or Prince is the Persian term for "realm protector."
- Prefect or Governor refers to what we might call a lieutenant governor.
- Governor or Captain refers to the ruler of an administrative district. Malachi 1:8 says that the province of Judea was administered by a "governor."
- Counselor or Judge is the Persian term for "counsel-giver." This term is unique to Daniel in all

known Aramaic literature.

- Treasurer is the Persian term for "treasure bearer."
- Justice or Counsellor is the Persian term for "law bearer."
- Magistrate or Sheriff is the Persian term for "over chief."
- The terms for "judges" and "magistrates" occur so far only in Daniel and in Aramaic documents of the sixth and fifth century.
- Provincial Officials or Rulers is a general term for government officials.

After looking at that list, one big question should immediately come to our mind - why are five of those terms Persian? In Chapter 3, we are still in the Babylonian or Chaldean kingdom when Daniel was a young man. Persia won't arrive until the end of Chapter 5 when Daniel is an old man. How do we explain these Persian terms?

The simplest explanation may be that, while these events occurred during the Babylonian kingdom, Daniel wrote them down during the Persian kingdom. And so perhaps when Daniel wrote the book he simply substituted the then current Persian titles for the older Aramaic terms.

Another possibility is that some Persian titles had already made their way into use among the Chaldeans at this time. We will soon see that such is true with some Greek musical terms.

And once again, this argument can be turned around on the liberal scholars. The use of these words Persian by Daniel actually points to an early date rather than a late date for the book of Daniel. Why? Because by the second century BC some of these Persian loan terms had become obsolete and could no longer be correctly translated by the Alexandrian Jews.

Daniel 3:4-7

4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, 5 That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: 6 And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a

burning fiery furnace. 7 Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

We asked a moment ago why Nebuchadnezzar built this statue. We may see a clue in verse 4, which tells us that the command applied to all people of every nation and language. It may have been Nebuchadnezzar's intention to unite his growing kingdom under one religious umbrella. Rome also did this several times - first with Caesar worship in the first century, and later with the Roman version of Christianity under Constantine.

Whatever the reason, it presents us with a humorous scene. As one commentator wrote:

Here we see all the great ones of the empire falling flat on their faces before a lifeless obelisk at the sound of a musical medley, controlled by the baton of King Nebuchadnezzar.

But is Nebuchadnezzar really the one holding the baton? Let's keep that question in mind as we proceed.

Let's look at the musical terms in verse 5. The KJV has "cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer" while the RSV has "horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe."

- "Cornet" or "Horn" is the only musical term found here that is also found elsewhere in the Old Testament.
- "Flute" or "Pipe" may come from the Hebrew word meaning to hiss or whistle.
- "Harp" or "Lyre" is a loan word from the Greek language.
- The term "Sackbut" or "Trigon" comes from the Greek word used in the Septuagint meaning a triangular harp.
- "Psaltery" or "Harp" comes from a Greek word that refers to a stringed instrument.
- The term translated "Dulcimer" or "Bagpipe" may not be an instrument at all, but may simply mean "in unison." Others think it refers to a percussion instrument.

As we saw with the list of titles, we again are faced with an immediate question from this list of musical terms: why are three of them Greek words? Greek rule wouldn't come along until after Persia, and Persian rule was nearly 70 years away when these events occurred. The liberals argue that such words would have been used only after Greek influence had spread throughout Asia following the conquest by Alexander the Great. How do we explain these Greek words?

The simplest explanation is to look at what type of words are being used here - they are all musical terms: harp, sackbut, and psaltery. Such terms are frequently borrowed when the instruments they describe become known.

And let's apply the modern liberal argument to another book - our song book. The word "legato" appears in some of the music. It is Italian for "tied together," meaning that the notes should be sung smoothly or connected. The word "fine" (pronounced "fen-nay") is also common. (It does not mean that you are doing fine!) It means "end" in Italian. When we see those terms in our song book, do we conclude the author of those songs must have been steeped in Italian culture? Silly, right? Why isn't it just as silly to conclude that the author of Daniel was steeped in Greek culture?

Experts now agree that Greek culture had penetrated the Near East long before the Neo-Babylonian period. These three terms may have been introduced by Greek traders before the rise of the Persian empire. The Elephantine papyri is a fifth century Aramaic document that contains a number of Greek words.

Also, we could ask how much cultural spread is required to learn three new words? If the book of Daniel had been written 400 years later and after 160 years of Greek rule over Palestine, then wouldn't we expect to find many Greek words instead of only three? As one commentator has said:

It is the fewness of the Greek words, coupled with the fact that they are only the names of musical instruments, that must prove fatal to the critics' theory that the book was written in 165 BC.

In verse 6 we finally reach what we knew as coming - the punitive elements of the king's decree. And what we see is that those who do not fall down and worship the image will be cast immediately into a burning fiery furnace.

The furnaces in Babylon were used to fire the bricks that were used to build the city. As we mentioned before, each brick bore the name and image of Nebuchadnezzar, and many can be seen today in the British museum. These bricks that we still have today may have been fired in the very

furnace spoken of here.

The fuel for the furnace was charcoal, and it burned at a very high temperature. Here is how one commentator has described a typical Babylonian furnace, some of which have been excavated:

It resembles a railway tunnel blocked at one end but with an entrance at the other. Uprights at frequent intervals support the dome and serve as ventilation shafts also. Charcoal provides the heat, and it is estimated that the temperature would have been 900 to 1000°C.

Death by burning at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar is not unique to this event. Jeremiah also speaks of it.

Jeremiah 29:22 - Because of them this curse shall be used by all the exiles from Judah in Babylon: The Lord make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire.

Let's pause for a moment and look more closely at this fiery furnace. Was Nebuchadnezzar the last person to ever threaten the people of God with such a punishment? Hardly! Nebuchadnezzar's message in these verses has always been the world's message to God's people: Comply or face the consequences!

The world still has its burning fiery furnaces, and the world still loves to throw God's people into them. If we step out of line in our woke but godless society, we too can expect to be cast into a fiery furnace!

Today, the world threatens us with furnaces of scorn and laughter, furnaces of criticism, furnaces of isolation, furnaces of intimidation, and furnaces of economic hardship.

- A photographer in New Mexico was fined \$6700 for refusing to photograph a lesbian "wedding" ceremony.
- A baker in Oregon faced jail time for refusing to bake a cake for a gay "wedding" ceremony.
- A florist in Washington was sued by the state for refusing to prepare an arrangement for a gay "wedding" ceremony.
- A sportscaster was fired by ESPN after only one day on the job for expressing his support for

traditional marriage.

- A student was dismissed from the counseling program at Augusta State University for her religious reservations about the homosexual lifestyle.
- A hotel in Vermont was fined \$30,000 and forced to shut down its wedding reception business after refusing to host a lesbian "wedding" ceremony.
- A student was kicked out of a doctoral program in education at Roosevelt University for expressing in class her belief that homosexuals are not born that way.

People in the United States are being fired from their jobs or are being thrown out of school or are being accused of sexual harassment simply for stating the long considered obvious truth that we are all born either male or female and that we all stay that way our entire lives.

That is what the Bible teaches. That is what common sense teaches. That is what science teaches. But that is not what the world teaches.

And let me ask this question - why do all of those people who tell us to just follow the science all start heading off in another direction when it comes to gender? Have we suddenly discovered a new chromosome?

Here is the truth about gender:

Matthew 19:4 - Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female?

Who would have ever thought we would have reached such a depth of depravity in this country that not only would Jesus' statement in Matthew 19 no longer be believed, but that those who remind the world of the obvious and self-evident truth of Jesus' statement would be persecuted?

One of my favorite books is *1984* by George Orwell, and one of my favorite quotes in that book is this: "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows." From a practical economic perspective, we no longer have that freedom in this country. That freedom went out the window when we could no longer read Matthew 19:4 out loud in public absent persecution.

And that reminds me of another favorite Orwell quote: "The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those that speak it."

The emperor has no clothes. And we must never be afraid to say so.

And let me tell you the sad truth - we should not expect the situation to improve. Instead, we should expect increased hostility and pressure from the world to conform to the world's view of things, but we must not conform.

Romans 12:2 - 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.

That verse should be the starting point whenever we are pressured to conform. Be not conformed to this world! We are about to see a wonderful example of three young men who lived that verse.

Daniel 3:8-12

8 Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. 9 They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. 10 Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: 11 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. 12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

"At that time certain Chaldeans came near." The world remains full of those "certain Chaldeans!" They are watching, and they are ready to pounce! The word "accused" in verse 8 is a translation of the idiom to "eat the pieces of flesh torn off from someone's body."

Who were these Chaldeans? We don't know for sure, but most likely they either included or were being influenced by the prominent Chaldean wise men who lost much of their prominence in Chapter 2. These "certain Chaldeans" likely resent the Jewish youths who had been given power over them in Chapter 2. And now was the time for revenge!

Yes, the Chaldeans were likely resentful, and yes they were likely jealous. But is that all that was going

on? Was there perhaps another reason behind this hostility against the Jews?

Yes, there was almost certainly some racial animosity going on here. Very often in history, the greatest racial animosity has occurred between peoples that have some sort of a distant affinity. Think, for example, about the Jews and the Samaritans. Was there a distant affinity between the Chaldeans and the Jews? Yes, one that goes all the way back to Abraham.

Genesis 11:31 - And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them **from Ur of the Chaldees**, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

So perhaps we can add racial hatred as a motivation here.

What is the first thing they do? They quote the king's edict word for word. It makes me wonder if they had in fact written it knowing that it would not be followed by the faithful Jews.

And after quoting the edict, they inform the king that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have paid no heed to the king or to his decree. "There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

Notice the subtle accusation against the king himself in that statement. "here are certain Jews whom **thou** hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon." We didn't create this problem, O king! You did! Perhaps you should have listened to us!

And the Chaldeans are appealing here to the king's sense of vanity. The disobedience of these three Jews is a personal affront to the king that is made even worse in view of all that the king had done for them. Where was their gratitude?

Was the accusation in verse 12 a truthful accusation? Yes and no.

The accusation is that "these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

The true part is that they refused to serve the Babylonian gods and worship the golden image. Just as they earlier refused to eat the unclean food, here they refused to worship the golden image for the same reason - it was against the law of God.

Exodus 20:3-5 - Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.

But that accusation was also partly false. It was not true that they had no regard for the king himself. They just had more regard for God. And when the law of the king came in conflict with the law of God, these three young men followed the law of God.

Daniel 3:13-15

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

The Bible is full of satire and humor, and only those who have never read it could say otherwise. Here we see a wonderfully satirical scene being acted out in real-life by the mighty Nebuchadnezzar.

Remember how these events started out? Whenever Nebuchadnezzar waved his baton, his subjects would faithfully dance to his tune like puppets.

But who is the puppet here in verse 13? And who is pulling the strings?

These verses answer those questions. It is the all-powerful Nebuchadnezzar who is the real puppet who dances while the Chaldean wise men operate the strings.

They pulled Nebuchadnezzar's strings, and the king does not disappoint. Nebuchadnezzar's response is exactly what these troublemakers wanted - he is in a furious rage.

Is there another reason why the king was so mad? A reason other than these three refusing to bow

down to the statue? Yes, and I think we see it all the way back in verse 2. These events were occurring in front of "the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces." The king was being embarrassed in front of a group he very badly wanted to impress.

So not only do we see the king dancing as a puppet for the Chaldeans, we also see him dancing as a puppet for his distinguished visitors! It is all starting to make us wonder who is really in charge here! Maybe we will find out soon...

Yes, the king is very angry. But as mad as he was, the king was not willing to condemn these three without some hard evidence. Perhaps that tells us that the king knew something about their character and their integrity. Whatever the reason, it seems that the king's justice would not allow these men to be condemned on just the word of their accusers, so the king gives them an opportunity to recant.

Notice how incredulous the king is in verse 14. "Is it true?," he asks. How could these three young men do this to him after all he had done for them? And, in fact, the king had done a lot for them in response to Daniel's request at the end of Chapter 2. It must have seemed inconceivable to the king that these three would refuse to obey this simple command. He many have wondered whether they were plotting a rebellion against him.

And notice the arrogance of the king in verse 15: "Who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?" The king seems to have forgotten all about what he said in Chapter 2 about the God of Daniel.

Daniel 2:47 - The king said to Daniel, Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery.

We have a parallel with Pharaoh's statement to Moses in Exodus 5:2, where he asked, "Who is Jehovah that I should obey him?" I love what Jim McGuiggan said about that question: "You recall that Moses signed him up for a ten-lesson correspondence course!"

Daniel 3:16-18

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. 18 But

if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Well, it looks like these three had a really big decision to make. Is that what we see here? Do we see them agonizing over what to do? Do we see them trying to figure out some clever way to answer the king that might save their lives?

No. We see none of that. In fact what we see in the KJV for verse 16 is these three telling the king that they "are not careful to answer" him in this matter. The ESV translates it this way: "we have no need to answer you in this matter."

What does that mean? What it means is that the decision had been made long ago. They knew that God had said, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," and they had decided long ago to do what God commanded no matter what.

After you decide to obey God no matter what, there aren't too many other things left to decide! In verse 16 they tell the king that they have no need to answer him - God will provide an answer to the question he asked in verse 15.

And perhaps verse 16 is not a so subtle message to the king that he should have already known their answer before he asked them for it. He was the king. He had conquered the Jews. He had promoted some of the Jews to be rulers in his kingdom. How could he not know the first thing about the Jews?

If we are looking for an all-powerful all-knowing king, Nebuchadnezzar is clearly not it!

We looked earlier at some modern-day examples of fiery furnaces. How should we respond when the world threatens to cast us into one? We should follow the example in verse 17-18.

We have an incredible statement of faith in verse 17: "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand."

And we have an incredible statement of courage in verse 18: "But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

"You are going to lose your job if you keep saying that gender is an unchanging and unchangeable God-given attribute." And our answer? "My God whom I serve is able to deliver me from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver me out of your hand. But if not, be it known unto you, that I will not

serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." And that I suspect will end the discussion.

There are so many wonderful lessons in the answer of verses 17-18!

#daniel