

Daniel

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[0 : 00] Today we are in Daniel chapter 3, and we will be looking at one of the more well-known passages having to do with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and that fiery furnace.

So if you will open your Bibles to chapter 3 of Daniel, we will get underway. Don't hesitate to interrupt me or to ask questions or just start talking.

And if you start talking, I'll stop and we'll hear what you have to say. If I don't see you, raise your hand. We are dealing with a time period that approximates 500 to 550 years before the birth of Christ.

And this is long before the Greeks or the Romans have ever come to power. In fact, this is before the Medes and Persians come to power.

This is the original kingdom of the head of gold that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. He is that head of gold and he represents the state of Babylon.

[1 : 14] And that's exactly where we are jumping in here. So put this, remember 586 B.C. was when the first increment of Jews were carried from Jerusalem over to Babylon.

And Daniel was in that first group as a young lad. And now we find in chapter 3 a scenario that is one of the more famous in the book of Daniel.

So let's begin reading Nebuchadnezzar, chapter 3, verse 1. The king made an image of gold, the height of which was 60 cubits.

Now if a cubit was what we think it was, it was ordinarily the cubit was the length, was the distance between the tip of the finger and the elbow of whoever the ruling monarch was.

He set the gauge for being a cubit. But by and large, over time, this came to be recognized as about 18 inches.

[2 : 22] So if this thing is 60 cubits high, we're talking about a statue that's 90 feet in height, which is a considerable undertaking to build something of that magnitude, especially when you consider what they had to work with back then, by way of being devoid of the kind of equipment and machinery and stuff that we have today.

And by the way, let me just inject this because this is really important to understand. And that is, the building of this image and the requirement that people bow down to it and everything, there's nothing more than one really obvious example of the fallen intellect, the skewed thinking of humanity.

Why in the world do people do things like this, this image that he is going to build, and then demand that people bow down to it? What does it signify?

When you recognize something like that and you bow down to it, you are in effect demonstrating your allegiance, you are demonstrating your inferiority to that image, you are acknowledging the supremacy of that image, but wait a minute, this thing is going to be built with men's hands.

Now how irrational is that? Completely. And when you look through the Old Testament, and not only the old, but the new as well, when you get into Acts 17, and the Apostle Paul entering the city of Athens, Athens, Greece.

[4 : 20] Athens was at the time the epitome of learning, of intellect, of brilliance. Here's where the Athenian philosophers came from, Mars Hill, this is what produced the Aristotles, and the Sosthenes, and the Platos.

These were the most brilliant, outstanding people of their day. And yet they were given completely over to paganism. They had all of these phony gods on every corner, and Paul says, you've even got a statue erected in the name of the unknown god, just in case you left out some deity, and didn't want to offend him.

This is his. Where does that come from? That comes from the skewed intellect, because when Adam and Eve disobeyed God, something dramatic that we do not understand, something dramatic, and for lack of a better term, we'll call it the sin principle, entered their lives and their bodies, and they became something other than what God created them.

They took upon them a foreign kind of nature that God had nothing to do with. And we know that this was part and parcel of the adversary, Satan.

And as a result, not only did their bodies fall, so that they became susceptible to disease, and the things that plague humanity to this day, but their thinking process became damaged as well.

[6 : 05] This is what I call a skewed intellect. This is what causes people to reach some of the harebrained conclusions that they do.

It's because of a fallen intellect that Hinduism thrives in India. It's a fallen intellect that atheism and Buddhism thrives where it does in China and Japan.

It's a fallen intellect that is responsible for all of the atheism and all of this stuff. It is men applying their minds to what they perceive as reality and coming up with the conclusions they do.

And this is why the world is the way it is. So we've got to keep that in mind. This reminds me of that Isaiah 55 passage where the Lord says, My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.

Neither are my thoughts your thoughts. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain comes down, nice morning to be talking about that, isn't it?

[7 : 14] As the rain comes down and the snow from heaven and returns not thither, but waters the earth and makes it to bring forth and bud so that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth out of my mouth.

It shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it. It shall prosper in the thing that God pleases. Yeah, Dan. These gods, did they actually represent the deity itself?

Or was it a symbol of a deity that they was out there someplace and it represented a deity that they were unknown?

Or was it the deity? Was it the physical itself? Yeah, they desired... You know, man... Man has ever had a desire to reduce the deity to something that we can see, feel, or touch.

And God specifically, specifically in that first and second commandment prohibits that making any graven image like unto him.

[8 : 26] And the reason he does is because this graven image, whatever it is, is an insult to the Almighty in that it suggests a limitation posed upon him.

and man has ever been infatuated with an idea of having a deity that he can see and feel and touch. And we are committed to physicality.

And God refuses to be accommodated that way because he is a God. He is an infinite God and that means he is without limitations.

And when you make some kind of a graven image and use that to represent God, frankly, it is a slap in the face. to the deity. And he deeply resents it. Joe? To help answer that question, later on in that chapter, you're going to read Nebuchadnezzar saw four people in there and one of them he called the Son of God.

Son of God. And that's what he called it, Son of God. And that infers that he pictures God as being something more miraculous looking. You know, like God, like a light or something different than human form, in other words.

[9 : 36] He pictures something different than human form, which is probably what was in there. Jesus was in it. So, they do look on it like that. Not as a tree. So, this statue was just a representation of what he thought his God was.

And they also thought that God's had sons. That would never be there to find God's had sons.

That's why he said that's a son of a God. Now, that comes later. Yeah, it's later in the chapter. And by the way, this all ties in with what Paul was referring to when he wrote to the Corinthians.

And the issue he was addressing there was whether it was acceptable for a Christian to eat meat that had been offered to an idol. Now, think of that. This is as pagan as it gets.

Meat offered to an idol? And then, Paul explains that those who are offering this meat to idols don't even understand or know what they are actually doing is worshipping demons.

demons because they are demons that are behind this whole concept of idolatry and these people don't even know it. And that, too, is part of the skewed intellect.

[10:45] Man thinks with a fallen reasoning and that is as fallen as is all the rest. That's what enables us to reach really harebrained conclusions about all kinds of things.

And as I pointed out, this is the principal reason. Not the only, but a principal reason why God has given us His Word. Frankly, it is to address our skewed thinking and allow us to make the changes in our thinking that brings us in line with the way God views things.

Yeah, Don? When I first read this, the first thing I went to my mind is where was Daniel? I figured he must have been somewhere in another province or he had been caught up in that mountain.

Yeah, well, good question. And you can't help but wonder about these things. And we aren't told exactly why he wasn't involved or where he was at the time. But you're right, he's not one of the principals.

So let's read on. Verse 2, Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps. That's just another word for a province or what we might even call like a state or a county.

[12:03] This is a geographical jurisdiction, the satraps. The prefects, the governors, the counselors, the satrap was an office holder in that area like the governor and so on.

The treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the rulers of the province to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar, the king, had set up.

Now, it probably ought to be noted that this area, historically and geographically, this area that is going to be dominated by the Medes and the Persians and is going to historically be referred to, and this is the way all of your encyclopedias refer to it, as the Persian Empire.

and it was the most extensive jurisdiction over which one person ruled that has ever existed on the globe.

You're talking about square miles. This was actually, in many ways, exceeded even that which Alexander the Great and the Romans would accomplish.

[13:13] I mean, the square mileage geographically of this area of the Medes and Persians at the time they ruled was just incredibly large.

I mean, it incorporated the whole Mediterranean basin and much of Africa. So, square mile-wise, it was absolutely enormous and they had 127 provinces that are going to be getting this word.

So, let's read on if we may. Chapter 3, verse 3. Then the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, 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.

Big celebration. And then the herald loudly proclaimed, to you, the command is given, O peoples, nations, plural, and men of every language.

This must have been quite a gathering. That at the moment, you hear the sound of the horn. I don't know that we need to read all these. I'll just run through them.

[14:25] The flute, the lyre, the trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, all kinds of music. You are to fall down. That's your cue. And worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar, the king, has set up.

Now, you realize that in a sense, in a very real sense, Nebuchadnezzar is actually elevating this stupid image above himself.

Now, how's that for rational thinking? Something that he had already ordered built, that the workers had engaged in, and who knows how long it took him to build this monstrosity, and all the while they are building it, it is something that he himself plans to give obeisance to.

Now, fellas, just think of how absurd that is. And yet, that is how far removed the human mind can be from what is truth.

And that's exactly what we're dealing with here. Joe Park. Remember his dream back, he had this dream about this? Yeah. Well, it doesn't say it in the Bible again, but it's easy to realize.

[15:40] He thought, but hey, if I make an image of gold all the way down, maybe this won't happen, then maybe I'll live for, I'll be the ever and ever and ever of the kingdom. You know, because this is the dream he had.

And that's a conjecture. This was also 90 feet then, that his dream of this was 90 feet. That's why he made his image of gold 90 feet because they think his dream of this man here, which Daniel had to give his dream.

That was... To increase his longevity. Yeah, yeah, right. Well, who knows? Whatever, whatever his thinking was, it was really screwball thinking. No question about that.

And, and by the way, you've got to keep in mind that this man and his thinking represented at the time the ultimate among men.

and this was the best they could come up with. This just goes to show you how far our fallenness has gone. It's pretty far.

[16:36] And, the only correcting of course is God's truth. So, verse 6, whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.

Now, wait a minute. That is quite a penalty. I mean, this is, that, he is considering refusal to bow down to this image a capital crime.

It's going to cost you your life if you don't do that. And, fellas, we have, we have little or no appreciation of the kind of brutality that human beings are capable of because we live in what we might consider a relatively civilized kind of society, but we all know there are pockets of brutality that exist.

There are pockets of brutality right here in Springfield. There are pockets of brutality that exist in a marriage relationship where there's supposed to be cherish and, you know, love and protect and so on.

There are pockets of brutality all around. But I do not see them put on display anywhere with the brutality. Well, maybe some, maybe some Islamic extremists can, can compete with some of this stuff.

[18:12] You know, the people that cut off people's heads and things like that, this, this, this kind of, and it is done for just one real reason, and that is to maintain absolute power and to intimidate and put the fear into anyone who may even think about challenging it, that this is what it's going to cost you.

And this, fellas, this is all about power. And today, the political scene here in the U.S., as well as Great Britain, as well as China, as well as Russia, all about power.

Everywhere. It's all about control. Because when you are in power, you are able to institute your agenda.

It is your will that will get done when you are in power. And that's why there is so much competition for this political power. Because each one vying for it is convinced that their application of their agenda is superior to the other guys.

And sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. And this is the government that is instituted among men. And here it is in one of its most extreme and brutal examples.

[19:40] And we already saw that earlier with the magicians and the soothsayers that could not reveal to Nebuchadnezzar what it was that he dreamed. And his response was off of their heads.

Kill them all. Kill them all. And the only thing that saved them, even though they were a bunch of ponies, the only thing that saved them was Daniel coming to the fore and being able to interpret the dream and so on.

But we're going to see demonstrations of this all the way through the book. And actually you find it all the way through the Old Testament. There's a and I saw I read an article just this morning in the morning paper about what's going on in Saudi Arabia.

And it talked about one of the sons who would be the second in command in Saudi Arabia is returning to Saudi Arabia after an extensive time of being afraid to return.

And why was he afraid to return? Because his older brother is the crown prince. And if you know anything about mid-eastern politics, particularly under Islam, the palace intrigue is always something to behold.

[21:04] And he says he's returning, this is the morning's paper, he's returning to Saudi Arabia after years of being afraid to. Apparently his brother made some kind of an over-surgling.

But this is what do you have to fear from your brother? For crying out loud, from your brother? What do you have to fear from him? Nothing, except execution. Because these people, they did that, and they still do that.

And the name of the game is, and you go through the kings, particularly the northern kingdom, and the northern ten tribes, they had several different kings that came to the throne, not a one of them was legitimate, none of them was from the tribe of Judah, the royal line, they were all illegitimate, and every one of them was a great-aged skunk.

And some of them came to power because they murdered the guy who was on the throne at the time and they took his place. And then you can imagine the intrigue that goes on.

So let's get along. We're in verse 8. For this reason, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews.

[22 : 14] Now you've got to remember that the Jews are leftover captives from, well, these are the Babylonians.

And the Jews that are going to surface later in the book of Esther will be under the Medes and the Persians. But these Jews are still under the jurisdiction of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians that defeated Israel and carried them into captivity.

And they have already been noted for their peculiarities. And the most outstanding peculiarity of the Jewish people early on was they insisted that there was just one God.

God. And to these pagan idolaters, that was the most weird thing that you could ever imagine, that there would be just one God. And that's why they were into many gods.

Polytheism, it's called. And the Jews had a reputation for believing that there was just one God. And as far as the Babylonians were concerned, their thinking was, you believe that there's just one God, huh?

[23 : 24] And his name is Yahweh, Jehovah. Well, he didn't do you very well, did he? When Nebuchadnezzar sent his armies in to destroy Israel and Jerusalem, where was your God then?

Why didn't he save you? And the reason he didn't save you is because the God of the Babylonians is a greater God than the God of Israel. And they had no idea that God was actually using the Babylonians to punish his own people Israel, just as Jeremiah prophesied.

Didn't have a clue about that, of course. So, let's get on. Certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon.

These guys are well positioned, obviously because they were men of great ability. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These are the Babylonian names.

Their earlier names are given in chapter 1. I don't recall them offhand because these are the ones I always refer to. But their Jewish names had been changed to these Babylonian names.

[24 : 29] And one of the reasons that they changed their names was for psychological reasons. And it was part of the brainwashing and conditioning. And it was to acculturate them to the Babylonian society and the Babylonian way of doing things as opposed to the Jewish way.

So, the idea was to completely convert these guys and give them a feel for Babylonian thinking as opposed to Jewish thinking.

And the name change thing is something we don't much identify with, but it's very, very important in biblical days. And when you were able to name something, that was tantamount to your being able to exercise jurisdiction and authority over that which you named.

and the first example we find of that is when God brought the animals to Adam and had Adam name them. And in doing so, that was a recognition of Adam's dominion over the animal creation. In fact, the text even says that God gave them dominion over the animals. And that simply meant that all of the animal creation, at least prior to the fall, were subservient to Adam and he named them.

[25 : 56] And then when you move on through the Old Testament and get beyond creation, you see the name and the name changing being very significant where God changed Abram's name to Abraham and he changed Sarai's name to Sarah and he's going to change Jacob's name to Israel and all of these name changes signify authority exercised by the one who is changing the names.

And it's like bringing them under a new jurisdiction. And it was a very significant thing. And here is exactly what the Babylonians have done to these three Hebrew children.

They've changed their names, given them Babylonian names. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these men, O king, have disregarded you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.

And then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger. Hey, these guys were good at rage and anger.

They engaged in it a lot. I guess Nebuchadnezzar, you can probably see, you can probably see the beans in his neck pop out, you know. And he is so filled with how dare they!

[27 : 23] Fellas, this is all about the human ego. That's what this is all about. I mean, Nebuchadnezzar had a super-sized ego ego that is going to dominate his life and God is going to break him of that later.

And as I've said before, we're going to see Nebuchadnezzar in heaven. As ornery as this guy was, and as bad as his background was, he is later on in the book of Daniel going to come to an

appreciation of the true God of heaven and worship him.

And that's going to be tantamount to a conversion to Judaism, if you will, in the Old Testament. But let's not get any further ahead than we are. So Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And these men were brought before the king. And Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?

And by the way, these three young men, along with Daniel, had all been placed in important positions. In other words, we could say that the king had really taken very good care of these guys. [28 : 48] He had looked out for them, he had given them plumb assignments because he recognized their value and their abilities, and he is bestowing them with significant responsibility, and this is how you thank me?

Huh. So. Well, Mark, it goes back to when Daniel was able to read his dream and everything and interpret it. That's when he gave his physicians to Daniel and his friends.

Daniel requested it from the king. Hey, how about my guys let them in on this too? It was back because he was able to do that. Right. So, this was a really big item, guys.

This was a really big item because Nebuchadnezzar knew that anyone who not only had the ability to interpret what I dreamed, but to actually be able to tell me what I dreamed, this guy has to have an inside track with a God who is really, really big.

Because none of these other guys, soothsayers, astrologers, magicians, none of these guys could do it, but he could. He's got an inside track with something, somebody, and he recognizes that.

[29 : 56] That's what the trouble is with us too. We recognize God. This is the lesson for it. We recognize God and believe in God, but then we also have other gods.

We don't give up our other gods, whatever they might be, money, whatever it is. And so, that was his problem too. He still kept his other gods, and he shouldn't have.

See, he did recognize that they had God, that they had this great God, but he kept his other gods, see. He didn't lose them. And that's what we do. That's the lesson for us in our now.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Well, how about just a couple of little ones, you know. Yeah. This is the difference between one, one who like Daniel, who has a heart that follows fully after God, as opposed to one who pays lip service.

I mean, Christ is later going to deride the Pharisees for saying, these people have an outward expression of righteousness.

[31 : 09] They cross their T's, and they dot their I's, and they're very precise, and all the rest of it. But, their heart is far from me. It was all an outward show.

And you guys really look good on the surface. Just like the whited sepulcher, all shiny and white and clean, but what is inside the sepulcher is decaying flesh and dead men's bones.

That's the way he described the Pharisees. Why he called them whited sepulchers. And, by the way, that is not politically correct to call somebody something like that.

And, of course, they were deeply offended by it, but it was also very accurate. So, Nebuchadnezzar responded, asked them the question, made them deny it, or admit it.

And now, if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, all these instruments again, to fall down and worship the image that I have made very well. In other words, this is your last chance.

[32 : 16] You have an opportunity to reconsider the foolishness of your decision. And probably, probably he considered it very gracious on his part to give them this opportunity.

Very magnanimous of me. Because he could have just ordered them thrown in, but no, he's going to say, I'm going to give you one more chance to do the right thing. Which, of course, was the wrong thing.

But this is their opportunity. And, Shadrach, will not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst.

Now, that's interesting. Not just into the fire, but into the midst. And the midst, I take it, would probably be the hottest portion of the whole thing, right in the middle, as opposed to the peripheral. Into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. And what God is there who can deliver you out of my hands?

[33 : 25] Now, here again, this shows you the screwball kind of thinking. He's already acknowledged these man-made deities as something that he is compelled to worship.

But now here, he is actually exercising a supreme kind of an authority over everything when he says, who is able to deliver from my hand?

So, he is actually placing himself in the position of ultimate supremacy. You see the vacillating here and the going back and forth? This crazy screwball thinking is part and parcel of the human mind. And what God is there who can deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, this is one of the greatest lines in the Bible, O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this.

In other words, we've already made our position clear. We don't need to reiterate it. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire.

[34 : 46] And he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. Actually, what he's saying here is he will deliver us out of your hand one way or another. He will either rescue us from the fire, or he will take us to himself through the fire.

You know, sometimes God delivers from death, sometimes he delivers through death, but he always delivers. And they're saying here, we know what God is able to do, we just don't know whether he's going to be pleased to do that or not.

He can do it if he wants to. And then, three of the greatest words in all the Bible, but, if not. Whatever the pleasure of God is, if he chooses not to deliver us, that's okay too.

Nevertheless, we will not bow down and serve this enemy. That's faith. That is faith. Some would say it is faith. Some would say it is stubbornness, but I prefer to think of it as steadfastness.

And there's a big difference between stubbornness and steadfastness. Every Christian man ought to be steadfast, but God help us and deliver us from stubbornness because there's a big difference there.

[36 : 05] And sometimes it can be a fine line, guys, between being steadfast and being stubborn. I know because I've been there and I've probably crossed that line more than I should have. And some of you can testify the same thing.

Hey, appreciate you being here this morning and thanks for your kind attention and thanks, Chrissy, for breakfast this morning. We do appreciate your service. And I think I don't know anything about people who wants to go up and go outilsk