

“Bow or Burn”

Daniel 3

In the late 1930s, adulation for Joseph Stalin in the USSR was building to the point where the mention of his name in a public meeting “triggered” a standing ovation *and* a standing dilemma—since no one dared to be the first to sit down. Finally, an elderly man, unable to stand any longer, took his seat. They jotted down his name and arrested him the next day because he had failed to worship the idol long enough. Rulers, especially dictators, are prone to use religion to consolidate their power—as was Nebuchadnezzar in today’s story.

Opening Question (choose one)

- Who is someone you admire for standing up for what they believe?
- Recall a time when you stood up against the crowd (in class, at work, at church). Why didn’t you just go along with what everyone else was saying or doing?

Study Questions

- 1) **Choose seven readers & read the Daniel 3 script.** What connection might there be between what King Nebuchadnezzar does here and the vision he saw in his dream (ch.2)?
- 2) What parts of the story seemed repetitive? Why do you think the author uses repetition?
- 3) At the dedication ceremony for this statue (vv.4-7), what was the king’s audience commanded to do? By whom? Why?
- 4) Can you think of parallels of this kind of political/religious pressure in our time? What kinds of things do powerful people “set up” and demand allegiance to?
- 5) What exception to this universal decree is duly noted (vv.8-12)? By whom? Why did they bring it to the King’s attention?
- 6) What is the King’s initial response (vv.14-15) and subsequent response (vv.19-23)? Why?
- 7) What do you find most surprising or challenging in Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s response (v. 16, v. 17, v. 18¹)?
- 8) Who appears with the three men in the furnace? Have you ever sensed God being with you in a crisis? What do you make of Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction(s)?
- 9) The king is concerned that no one says anything *against* their God (v.29), but he does not yet say or do anything himself *for* this God. Why might this be?
- 10) What aspect of the story do you found most confusing? challenging? inspiring? Why?

¹ “But even if he does not” should not be taken as an absence of faith or preparing for the worst, just in case. Rather, it is a continuing affirmation of complete faith in God while still leaving God is freedom to do as God pleases. In Hebrews 11:39 all those miraculously delivered *and* those who died as martyrs were commended for their faith.

DANIEL 3

Choose 7 Readers: Narrator 1, Herald, Narrator 2, Astrologer, King, Shadrach, Advisor

Narrator 1: King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,^[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ²He 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. ³So 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. ⁴Then the herald loudly proclaimed,

HERALD: "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵As 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. ⁶Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

Narrator 2: ⁷Therefore, 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.

Narrator 1: ⁸At this time some astrologers^[b] came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar,

ASTROLOGER: "May the king live forever! ¹⁰Your 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, ¹¹and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹²But 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."

Narrator 2: ¹³Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴and Nebuchadnezzar said to them,

KING: "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵Now 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?"

Narrator 1: ¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him,

Shadrach: "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to

deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^[c] 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."

Narrator 2: 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.

Narrator 1: 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.

Narrator 2: ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers,

KING: "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

Advisor: "Certainly, Your Majesty."

KING: ²⁵ "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

Narrator 1: ²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted,

KING: "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

Narrator 2: 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,

KING: "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."

Narrator 1: ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.