

Daniel 3: Four in the Fire

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Recap of [Daniel 2](#): Interpretation of Dreams

Daniel was given the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream because He relied on God's promises. He prayed together with his friends and sought God, and the interpretation of the dream was given.

Daniel, like Joseph

This week I was reminded that Pharaoh, King of Egypt, also had mysterious and troubling dreams. God used Joseph to give him the interpretation. Like Daniel in Babylon, Joseph in Egypt

was given favor by the pagan king and promoted to rule alongside the Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:37-41

³⁷ So the advice was good in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants. ³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?”

³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you. ⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you.” ⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.” (Gen.41:37-41, *emphasis added*)

“And Pharaoh said to his servants,
“Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?”

Genesis 41:38



Daniel 3:1-7

“Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

² And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

³ So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁴ Then a herald cried aloud: “To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,

⁵ that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up;

⁶ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

⁷ So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.” Daniel 3:1-7

King Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold

Remember the statue-like image of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream? ([Daniel 2:32, 38](#))

He was the head of gold ([Daniel 2:38](#)). Babylon was extremely wealthy and prosperous.

So it is very fitting that King Nebuchadnezzar decides to *build himself* an image of gold.

A huge statue.

He clearly missed the point of the dream. The dream wasn't so that he would go out and build himself a golden image, it was to alert him about the future of his kingdom and the kingdoms after him, but he fixates on the gold.

See Babylon was like Texas. Everything had to be bigger there.

An Israeli cubit was about 18" while in Babylon a cubit was measured as about 20."

This would make King Nebuchadnezzar's statue the size of a 10 story building, which for ancient Babylon lacking modern construction machines, was a good size.

It was 60 by 6 cubits. Not 70 by 7. It was a mere imitation of greatness. Symbolically, the number 6 means incompleteness in the Bible, sinfulness of mankind, human weakness, and the evil devil.

What was the image?

The Bible doesn't tell us what the image actually was.

Was it a statue of one of the Babylonian deities? Or more likely: was it an image of King Nebuchadnezzar himself? Babylonian kings were worshipped as divine. Receiving a divinely-inspired dream, then, King Nebuchadnezzar may have

felt very entitled to being worshipped, considering himself one amidst a pantheon of gods.

Dedication of the image

King Nebuchadnezzar decrees that all of his government officials have to come to the dedication of the idolatrous statue. What's more, all of these people would be required to bow down and worship the gold idol when his pagan worship band starts playing.

Worship: or else . . .

The spirit of Babylon always forces a pluralistic and polytheistic agenda. Pluralism is the accepting of all religions as equally valid. Polytheism is the belief in multiple gods. Babylon claims to promote religious tolerance. We see evidence of that in their worship because the names of the instruments are actually written in Greek. The rest of this chapter is written in Aramaic, but the uniting of pagan practices and musical influences was occurring in Babylon. The empire wanted to put on a show of inclusivity and universalist worship!

But King Nebuchadnezzar's herald (or spokesman) warned all of his colleagues: "whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." (Daniel 3:6)

So much for tolerance.

It is the spirit of the antichrist.

Daniel 3:8-18

"Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. ⁹ They spoke and said to King

Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image;

¹¹ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?

¹⁵ Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (Daniel 3:8-18)

Accuser of the brethren

Some of the Chaldeans (remember, this is just another name for Babylonians) decide to accuse the Jews. ([Daniel 3:12](#)). The Aramaic term there in [Daniel 3:8](#) ܩܪܬܝܢ “*qerets*” translated as simply “charges” has a deeper connotation of “*maliciously accused*” and more literally, “to eat the pieces of, to devour piece by piece” (*NKJV Study Bible*).

So the Chaldeans came forward to maliciously accuse Daniel’s friends “to devour them a bit at a time, piece by piece.” It’s interesting that Daniel is not accused at this point, only his friends.

[1 Peter 5:8](#) says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” Here we have the same description. And recall from last week that the military commander’s name [Arioach](#) is related to the word for lion. Babylonian art was full of lion depictions that represented the king’s power and one of their goddesses. The devil is an imitator. Roaring but always lacking. We serve the Lion of the Tribe of Judah:

“But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.” Revelation 5:5

200 years later, we see the same accusatory spirit of Haman in the Medo-Persian Empire:

Esther 3:6

⁶ “But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.” (Esther 3:6)

The devil is the Accuser:

Revelation 12:10

"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the **accuser of our brethren**, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down." (Revelation 12:10)

In [Daniel 3:12](#), Daniel's friends are listed by name. Their accusers are trying to really make a point. An "us" vs. "them" point.

They want to remind King Nebuchadnezzar that these *Jews*, who serve in the government *refuse to assimilate* into the pagan culture.

And King Nebuchadnezzar follows the antiSemitic lead of his advisors, but to his credit, ([Daniel 3:14](#)) he does ask the Hebrews directly if the accusations are true.

Refusal to Worship Pagan Deities

[Daniel 3:13](#) describes King Nebuchadnezzar as being in a "rage and fury!"

He addresses Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego and asks them directly: is this true? Do you not worship my golden image?

He gives them a second chance. *"Next time you hear my worship team leading idol worship, make sure you fall down and worship."* He even says that would be "good!"

And then he threatens them. Worship or else you're being thrown into an oven.

King Nebuchadnezzar's pride becomes very glaring.

[Daniel 3:15c “who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”](#)

Back in [Daniel 2:47](#), King Nebuchadnezzar had acknowledged that Daniel’s God is Lord of kings and able to reveal secrets. Did he forget already? Or did he not realize that Daniel’s friends also shared strong faith in the God of Israel? King Nebuchadnezzar viewed himself as a god and because our God cannot be seen with human eyes, he didn’t think there would be any intervention.

In [Daniel 3:16](#), the three Judean young men don’t challenge Nebuchadnezzar. It kind of reads that way, like “we don’t need to answer you!” But it’s not that so much as they were admitting they had nothing to say, no answer for the king because their refusal to worship was so obvious.

A lot of people in our culture today, especially those who have grown up with a religious spirit are uncomfortable with expression in worship. They don’t want to raise their hands or they don’t want to physically bow before the Lord in prayer. But one of the very main definitions of worship used throughout the Bible is the Hebrew word “שָׁחָה” *shachah*, which means to “bow down, very low.” It is a physical action shown the heart’s devotion.

In the time of Babylon, it was no different. Worship, whether it was the worship of the One True God of Israel, or worship of a pagan deity, was understood as being physically prostrate before the object of worship.

So it was obvious that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were not physically bowing before anything. There was no need to defend themselves, they knew they were guilty of disobeying the king’s order.

But they demonstrated great faith.

[“Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning](#)

fiery furnace and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.” Daniel 3:17-18

For me this brings to mind Isaiah 26:3:

“You will keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You.” Isaiah 26:3

The testimonies of believers who have gone before can really be encouraging. Daniel and his friends can really inspire us to trust in God no matter what happens and no matter the cost. Paul suffered and maintained an unwavering faith. He and Timothy wrote to the church in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11:

“⁸ For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, ¹⁰ who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,¹¹ you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.” 2 Cor..1:8-11

The death sentence given by the world is meaningless.

1 Corinthians 15:55-58:

“O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the

law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

He has not forgotten about you. He knows the labor of love you do in service to Him. He sees you and He smiles. He died for you so you could live and when you face the world's fiery furnaces and you feel under attack or afraid for your future, just remember, place your hope and trust in Him. He is your confidence and your rescuer, your mighty Savior.

Daniel 3:19-25

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

²¹ Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²² Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast

three men bound into the midst of the fire?"

They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

²⁵ "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

The Bible says that Nebuchadnezzar's countenance – the expression on his face – changed. Some translate this as "his face was distorted with his fury." He took on a spirit of rage and his whole attitude worsened (NIV).

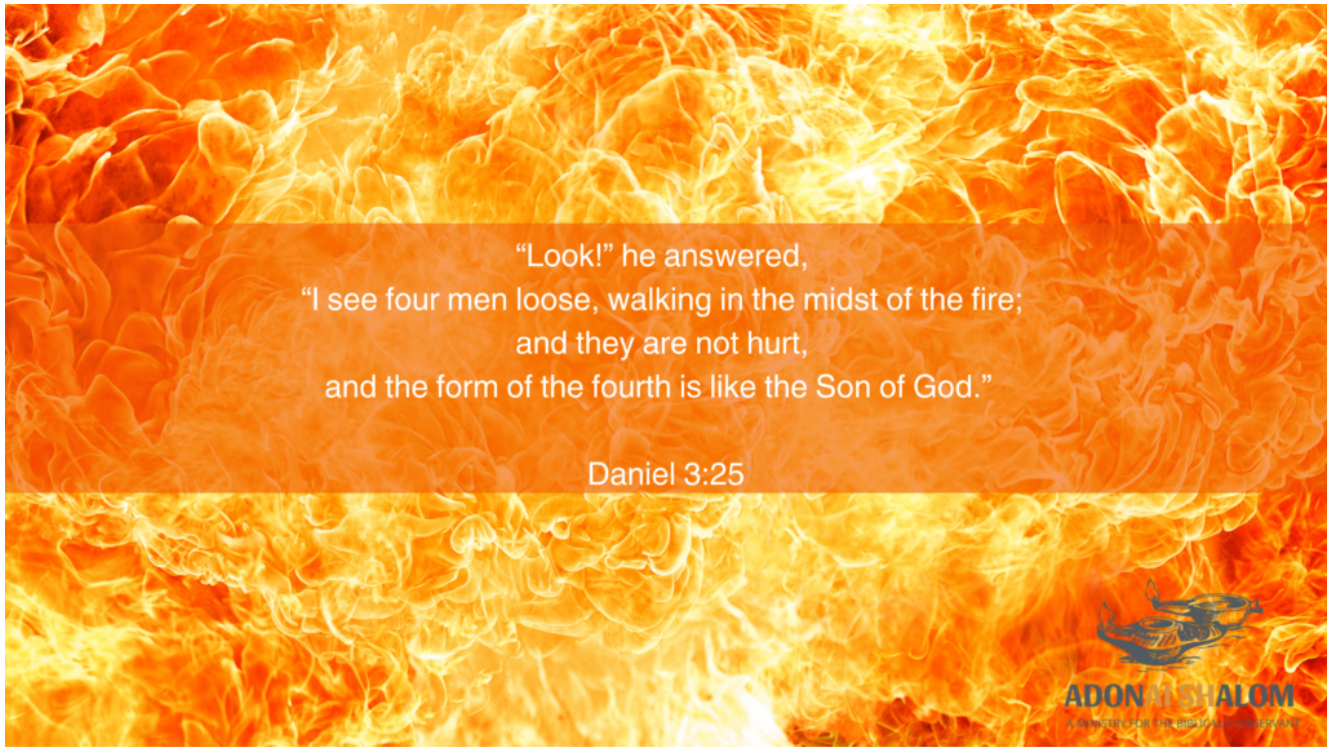
He orders the furnace turned up to 7x hotter than normal and then has his valiant army man bind up Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and throw them into the fire.

The fiery furnace was so hot that it killed anyone near it. King Nebuchadnezzar's men died instantly. To Nebuchadnezzar they were disposable. He makes no mention of their death. He is satisfied to oversee the three Judeans falling over in a fire, but then . . . he is completely taken aback.

3 tied up Hebrew men were cast into the fire, but now they were freely walking in the fire unharmed, and now not 3, but 4! The only thing that had burned were the ropes that had tied them up! The Septuagint translation (the Greek translation of the original Aramaic/Hebrew) actually says that King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished because he heard the men singing praises! It reminds me of Paul and Silas singing praises in the jail ([Acts 16:25](#)).

The Fourth Man in the Fire

NKJV: "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Daniel 3:25



The New King James and the King James translates this as the Son of God. If you have commentary notes in your Bible, you might notice that Son of God could be translated as “son of the gods.” So which is it?

In Aramaic, the generic word for “God” is singular “Elah.” The plural for “Elah” is “elahin”, which although etymologically related to the Hebrew (a related Semitic language) for God, “Elohim,” the difference is that “*elahin*” is used only to refer to idols.

So (unusually!) the NIV actually translates this a bit more accurately:

NIV: [“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.”” Daniel 3:25](#)

Why?

King Nebuchadnezzar wouldn’t understand a singular Son of God. We know it was Jesus. But, we have to be careful reading translations (the original manuscripts of Scripture are 100% right).

So King Nebuchadnezzar expresses in his own language and his own understanding that there is Someone, of divine origin, who has appeared in the fire. He doesn't know how to express what he is seeing from his pagan context.

I actually think that gives the text more power, not less. King Nebuchadnezzar is astonished because he is not the supreme deity. He has to really grapple with this . . . who are these Judeans and who is with them!?

This is an example of a *theophany*. A theophany is an appearance of God. The king of Babylon was astonished by this, but the Bible doesn't mention if the 3 youth even knew the 4th man (Jesus!) was there. Sometimes God will manifest in a very tangible, apparent way in our lives, but other times, He is working and we don't even realize how close He is to our situation.

Daniel 3:26-30

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or

language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon." Daniel 3:26-30

The Most High God and His Messenger

In verse 26, King Nebuchadnezzar switches to "Elah," the singular form! Here he is beginning to understand! He acknowledges that the 3 young men serve the Most High God (*Elah*). He is recognizing that the God of the Hebrews is greater than his Babylonian gods by singling Him out.

King Nebuchadnezzar only calls the 3 men out of the fire. The 4th man was heavenly enough in appearance, he knew not to even go there. The Chaldean advisors saw with their own eyes that the fire had no power whatsoever on them and they didn't even smell like a fire.

Nebuchadnezzar celebrates this singular victorious God. Nebuchadnezzar sent his "Angel." This is an accurate translation for the Aramaic מַלְאַךְ (mal·'a·chēh) (Hebrew: מַלְאָךְ malach). "Angel" can also be translated as "Messenger." Nebuchadnezzar recognizes that a Messenger from God was in the fire.

No Other God can deliver like this

King Nebuchadnezzar realizes that no other God can deliver like this and he says no one is allowed to slander Hananiah, Mishael, nor Azariah. In keeping with his excessively brutal personality, King Nebuchadnezzar decrees that anyone who does speak against them shall be chopped up and their homes burned. This chapter ends with another promotion: the 3 Hebrew youth are once again promoted in the province of Babylon.

Faith and Obedience no matter the cost

The ordeal of Daniel's friends remind me of [Hebrews 11:32-40](#):

[³² And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again.](#)

[Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.](#)

[³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, ⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.](#)

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were willing to pay the ultimate price to remain faithful and obedience to the One True God. And the LORD revealed Himself! May the LORD give us the strength to be that faithful!