



Daniel 3

The Fiery Furnace

3:1-23; 3:91-4:1

Last week

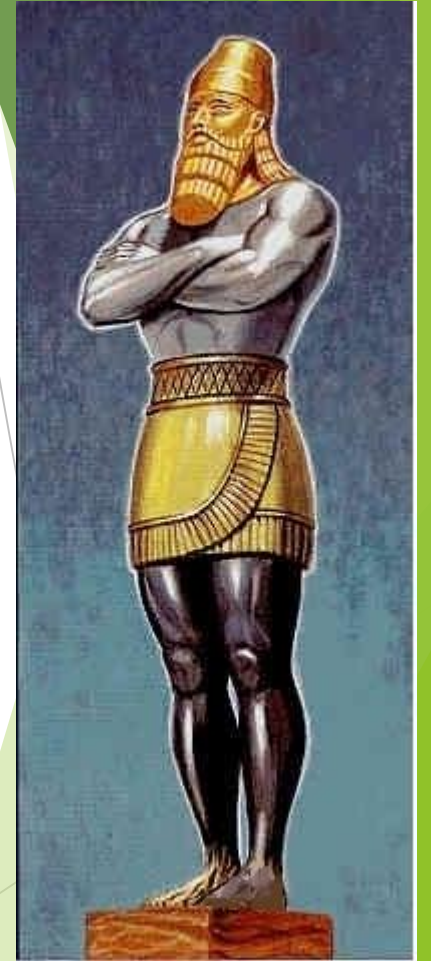
In chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar had a dream.

Daniel revealed the dream and its meaning to the King.

The dream revealed the fall of empires on earth over the next 400 years of history, including the fall of Babylon.

It ended with an apocalyptic vision of the Messianic age in the end times. God revealed the dream and its meaning to Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that the god of Daniel is the “God of gods.”



Context for Daniel 1-6

Stories about Daniel place him and his companions in exile in Babylon sometime after Judah, and Jerusalem were conquered. (585 BC and later)

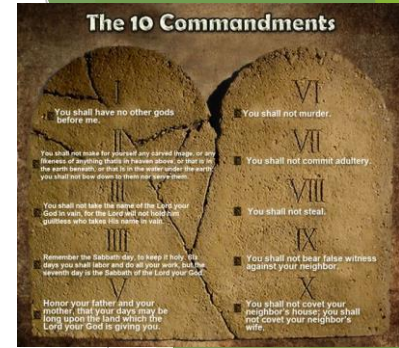
Jeremiah was a prophet in Judah with a difficult task before the fall of Jerusalem.

“Roam the streets of Jerusalem, look about and observe, search through her squares, *to find even one who acts justly and seeks honesty*, and I will pardon her!

² They say, “As the LORD lives,” but in fact they swear falsely.” (Jer 5:1-2)



Belief in one God



They had the Law handed down from Moses: (~1200 BC)

2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. **Exodus 20:2-6**

Worship of many gods has grave consequences for Judah- Jeremiah 7

- ▶ ¹⁷ Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah, in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸ The children gather wood, their fathers light the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven, ^[d] while libations are poured out to other gods—all to offend me! ¹⁹ Are they really offending me—oracle of the LORD—or rather themselves, to their own disgrace? ²⁰ Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: my anger and my wrath will pour out upon this place, upon human being and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruits of the earth; it will burn and not be quenched. Jeremiah 7:17-20

Isaiah makes a case for one God

Isaiah 45

I am the LORD, there is no other, there is no God besides me. It is I who arm you, though you do not know me,⁶ so that all may know, from the rising of the sun to its setting, that there is none besides me. Isaiah 45: 5-6

It was I who made the earth and created the people upon it; It was *my hands* that stretched out the heavens; I gave the order to all their host.¹³ It was I who stirred him (Cyrus) up for justice; all his ways I make level. He shall rebuild my city and let my exiles go free without price or payment, says the LORD of hosts. Isaiah 45:12-13

Isaiah points out the futility of false gods made by the hands of men



He picks out for himself trees of the forest, (Isa 44:14)
... with some of the wood he warms himself,
makes a fire and bakes bread.....

He warms himself and says, “Ah! I am warm! I see the flames!” (Isa 44:16) ¹⁷ The rest of it he makes into a god, an image to worship and adore. He prays to it and says, “Help me! You are my god!” ¹⁹ He does not think clearly; he lacks the wit and knowledge, a deluded mind has led him astray; he cannot save himself....

False gods must be *carried*..

But the LORD will lift *us* up.. Isaiah 46:1-5

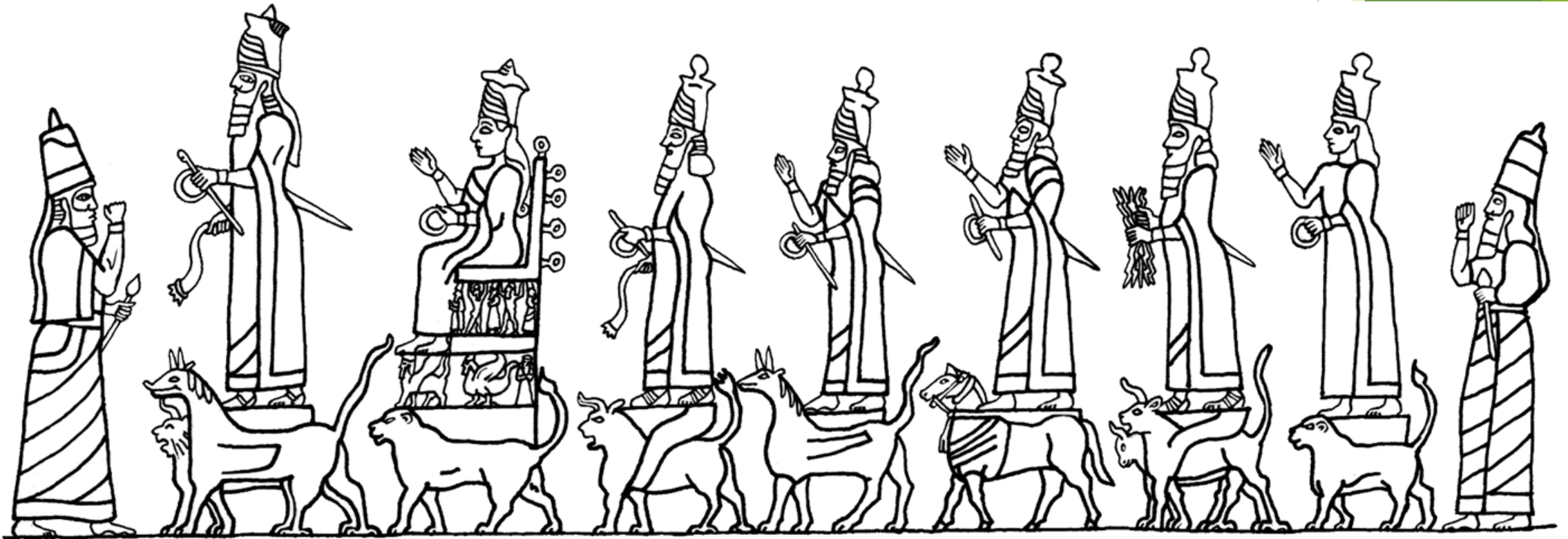
Bel bows down, Nebo stoops, their idols are set upon beasts and cattle; they must be borne upon shoulders, a load for weary animals.

² They stoop and bow down together; unable to deliver those who bear them, they too go into captivity.

³ Hear me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, my burden from the womb, whom I have carried since birth.

⁴ Even to your old age I am he, even when your hair is gray *I will carry you*; I have done this, and *I will lift you up, I will carry you to safety.*

..they must be borne upon shoulders, a load for weary animals.



In chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar creates a golden god!



¹ King Nebuchadnezzar had a golden statue made, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, which he set up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. (Dan 3:1)

The statue would have been 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. It is not certain if this was a new god or an image of one of the many gods of Babylon.

A dedication ceremony is planned and representatives of all the provinces of Babylon are required to attend.

Chapter 3 - The test

Daniel does not appear in this chapter at all. His three companions are tested here and their Babylonian names are used. (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)

A herald calls out this proclamation:

“Nations and peoples of every language, ⁵ when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, dulcimer, harp, double-flute, and all the other musical instruments, you must fall down and worship the golden statue which King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship shall be instantly cast into a white-hot furnace.” (Dan 3:4-6)



The horn, pipe, zither, dulcimer, harp, double-flute, and all the other musical instruments

Notice that throughout this chapter there is much repetition of phrases and this is one that is repeated.

The power of music in worship settings, especially involving a large crowd, cannot be overstated. The exact nature of the instruments is uncertain.

However some translations use “bagpipes” as one of the instruments. The idea is hotly refuted by other commentaries, bagpipes were not apparently used in ancient Babylon.



The Furnace

The “furnace” was probably a limekiln. It is possible that this refers to the Canaanite and Phoenician practices of offering human sacrifices into a burning furnace to honor the god Molech, the Canaanite god of fire. The furnace may have been on or near an altar of sorts.

Burning criminals alive was not a common practice but it did occur and the prophet Jeremiah foresaw that Nebuchadnezzar would burn false prophets.



Jeremiah's prophecy

Jeremiah 29:21-23

²¹ This is what the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, says about Ahab, son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, son of Maaseiah, who prophesy lies to you in my name: I am handing them over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, who will kill them before your eyes. ²² And because of them this curse will be used by all the exiles of Judah in Babylon: “May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in fire,” ²³ because they have committed an outrage in Israel, committing adultery with their neighbors’ wives, and alleging in my name things I did not command. I know, I am witness—oracle of the LORD.

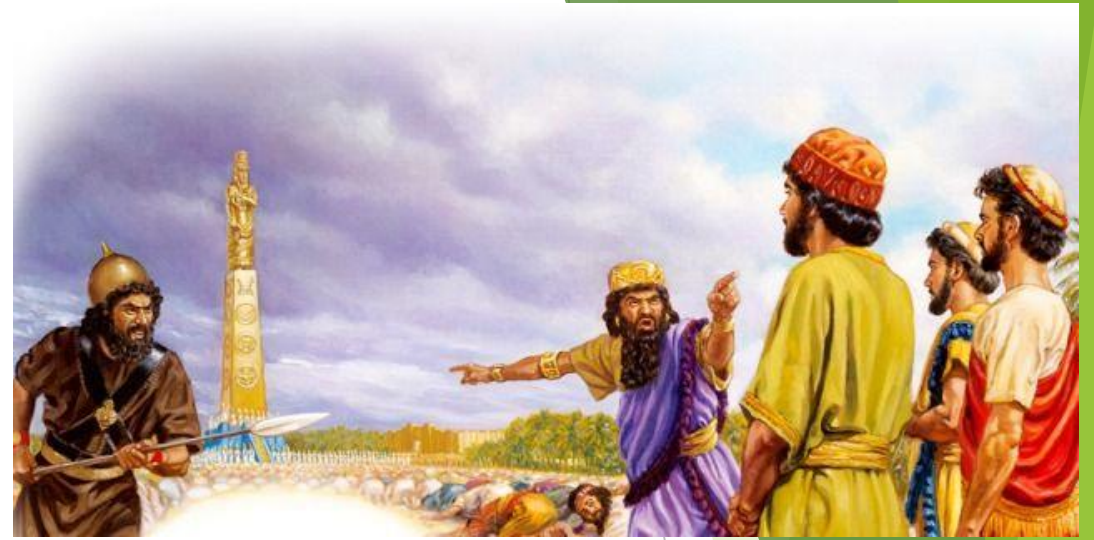
The Law of the King can not be withdrawn.

Once declared, a King's law cannot be withdrawn. We saw this also in the Book of Esther. It is possible that Nebuchadnezzar could not take back his order to throw the men into the furnace, even if he wanted to.

But was there also a bit of jealousy among the Babylonian officials and the Jews who were elevated to high political positions?

Jews were among the conquered peoples under the thumb of Babylon who would have been expected to occupy positions of *servitude* rather than leadership!

The tattletales... (3:12)



- ▶ ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have made administrators of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have paid no attention to you; they will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up.”
- ▶ Notice that they did not say “certain men” here. Is there a bit of antisemitism here?

Nebuchadnezzar gives them a chance to explain and repent.. (3:14-15)

- ▶ “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you will not serve my god, or worship the golden statue that I set up? ¹⁵ Now, *if you are ready to fall down and worship the statue I made*, whenever you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, dulcimer, harp, double-flute, and all the other musical instruments, then all will be well; if not, you shall be instantly cast into the white-hot furnace; and who is the God who can deliver you out of my hands?”

They refuse to bow down to the gold idol.

The King is in a rage and asks “Who is the God who can deliver you out of my hands?”

Nebuchadnezzar seems to believe he is more powerful than the LORD!

The reply from the martyrs - “But even if he will not, you should know, O king, that we will not serve your god or worship the golden statue which you set up.”

They do not question whether or not the Lord is *able* to save them, they just are not certain it is his will to do so.

Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury

His joyous celebration has changed into an execution.
He is not accustomed to being disobeyed.

The king orders the furnaces to be heated up seven times hotter than usual. Probably with 7X the wood.

“He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times more than usual ²⁰ and had **some of the strongest men in his army** bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and cast them into the white-hot furnace.” (3:19-20)

BIG MISTAKE!



Acting in anger is a very bad decision..

And in one ill-advised decision, made by his emotions in the fury of a moment, Nebuchadnezzar is going to lose some very valuable people. And this is a picture of a man who has lost control of himself.

The three heroes are bound by the strongest men of the king's army. They do not take even time to disrobe them. The fire is so hot that throwing the men into the fire caused the *death of the king's men*.

“So huge a fire was kindled in the furnace that the flames devoured the men who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into it.” (3:22)



The King and his court witness a miracle.



Proverbs 11:8 The righteous person is rescued from trouble, and it falls on the wicked instead.

The soldiers have been killed by the fire, but as the king peers into the furnace he sees not three men but four!

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was startled and rose in haste, asking his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?” “Certainly, O king,” they answered. ⁹² “But,” he replied, “I see four men unbound and unhurt, walking in the fire, and the fourth looks like *a son of God*.” (3:91-92)

Saved by faith

Not only are the three men unbound and walking about in the fire, but they are unharmed and a fourth man is seen with them.

He is described as God's angel or the Son of God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are saved by their faith and their faithful actions. They were saved from the fire.

Faith is Jesus Christ and living faithfully saves us all from the “loss of heaven and the pain of Hell.”

“Jesus” in Hebrew means “God Saves”

God brought Israel out of Egypt.

He gave us the Word that we might know God and avoid sin.

Through Jesus, His eternal Son, made man, (He) “will save his people from their sins”.

Catechism 430



Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are unharmed.

He calls the three Jews “servants of the Most High God,” and calls them out of the fire. They were untouched by the flames.

When the satraps, prefects, governors, and counselors of the king came together, they saw that the fire had had no power over the bodies of these men; not a hair of their heads had been singed, nor were their garments altered; there was not even a smell of fire about them. (3:94)

Isaiah's prophecy fulfilled...

But now, thus says the LORD,

who created you, Jacob, and formed you, Israel:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name: you are mine.

² When you pass through waters, I will be with you;
through rivers, you shall not be swept away.

**When you walk through fire, you shall not be
burned, nor will flames consume you.**

³ For I, the LORD, am your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your savior. **Isaiah 43:1-3**

Nebuchadnezzar praises God

“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent his angel to deliver the servants that trusted in him; they disobeyed the royal command and yielded their bodies rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ⁹⁶ Therefore I decree for nations and peoples of every language that whoever blasphemes the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ***shall be cut to pieces and his house made into a refuse heap***. For there is no ***other*** God who can rescue like this.” (3:95-96) (Same threat as is Ch. 2!)

How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders; his kingship is an everlasting kingship, and his dominion endures through all generations. (3:100)

What do we learn from this story?

- ▶ Even if persecuted for your faith, it is important to put your trust in God and persevere.
Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ▶ We need to be intimately familiar with God's Word so that we can rightly discern how to live in a way that honors and pleases God: able to identify situations when God's law is being violated by the civil authority.

More lessons learned

If we truly live a life of faith others may learn of God through our actions. “They will know we are Christians by our love.”

From Nebuchadnezzar we learn that it is ill advised to make decisions that affect others in haste or when angry.

Let us pray

Isaiah 45: 5-9

I am the LORD, there is no other, there is no God besides me. It is I who arm you, though you do not know me, ⁶ so that all may know, from the rising of the sun to its setting, that there is none besides me.

I am the LORD, there is no other. ⁷ I form the light, and create the darkness, I make weal and create woe; I, the LORD, do all these things. ⁸ Let justice descend, you heavens, like dew from above, like gentle rain let the clouds drop it down.

Let the earth open and salvation bud forth; let righteousness spring up with them! I, the LORD, have created this.

⁹ Woe to anyone who contends with their Maker..

