

4. Explain the significance of the "stone" dashing the image to pieces.
5. Explain the relevance of this dream and its interpretation for 20th century Christians.

CHAPTER THREE

I. DIVINE DELIVERANCE—3:1-30

a. PAGAN DEITY

TEXT: 3:1-7

- 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.
- 2 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, 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 satraps, the deputies, and the governors, 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.
- 4 Then the herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,
- 5 that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psalter, dulcimer, and all kinds of music, 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 peoples heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of music, all the people, the nations, and the

languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

QUERIES

- a. Why did Nebuchadnezzar make an image of gold?
- b. Why did he command that it be worshipped?
- c. Why all the different musical instruments at once?

PARAPHRASE

King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that a great image, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, overlaid with gold, be fashioned and erected on the Plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then he sent messages to all the princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counsellors, and other minor judiciary and all the rulers of the different provinces that they should come to the dedication of this great statue. When all these different officials had arrived and were standing before the statue, a herald shouted out, Oh people of all nations and languages, this is the king's command: when you hear the sound of these instruments all together, the horn, flute, harp, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall on your face and worship king Nebuchadnezzar's statue. Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a flaming furnace. So when these instruments were all played at once, everyone—whatever his nation, language or religion—fell to the ground and worshipped king Nebuchadnezzar's statue.

COMMENT

v. 1 . . . THE KING MADE AN IMAGE OF GOLD . . . Nebuchadnezzar's motive for such a grand undertaking is not stated. It is quite possible that, overcome with pride because of his conquests and influenced by Daniel's identification of him as the head of gold of the great dream-image, the king erected this image to do honor to his gods for victory as well as to do honor to himself.

The image was 60 v 6 cubits (dimensions expressed in terms of Babylonian sexagesimal system), which would measure today 90 x 9 feet. Imposing but not impossible.

It may have been in the form of an obelisk, nine feet in breadth at the base. Grotesque, to be true, but this is characteristic of much of Babylonian sculpture. Diodorus records a statue of a god which was forty feet in height and weighed 1000 Babylonian talents. The Colossus of Rhodes was 70 feet tall. Some of the Buddhist images of Buddha are equally as imposing and grotesque.

The plain of Dura according to one archaeologist was about 12 miles southeast of the city of Babylon where there is excavated a rectangular brick structure forty-five feet square and twenty five high which may have formed the pedestal of a colossal image. The Babylonian empire was divided into provinces over which "satraps" ruled. This great image was located somewhere in the *province* of Babylon, probably very near the capital city of Babylon.

V. 2-3 THEN NEBUCHADNEZZAR THE KING SENT TO GATHER TOGETHER THE SATRAPS . . . For the formal, dedication of this great golden image Nebuchadnezzar sent RSVP invitations to all of the officials of the kingdom. If all the under-rulers of the realm were there, there would also be a great throng of thousands of people. Such a dedication would have a great psychological effect upon officials and people of the power of the empire and the king. It would bind the empire together in patriotic and religious bonds. In those days practically all nations believed that success in military conquests was attributable to the power of the victor's gods over the gods of the vanquished. If a nation had prevailed over another nation, the thing that happened behind the scenes was that the victorious nation's gods had prevailed over the defeated. The king was merely expecting men to do what men naturally expected to do—pay homage to Babylon's god for many victories. There was no primary intention, on Nebuchadnezzar's part, to practice any religious persecution, or to interfere with anyone's worship of his own gods, or to compel men to accept a new god as their own. In those days all men were expected to practice syncretism in religion. That is, it was taken for granted that they would do homage to the god or gods of any particular nation or culture in which they found themselves. At the same time, they might worship their own particular deity

without fear of interference if they did homage to the local deity also. In fact, the worship of as many gods as one might know about was the vogue of the day.

In the list of Babylonian officials we have three, perhaps four, of the official terms of office in the Persian language. So many Persian titles some fifty years before the Persians ruled the world proves rather disconcerting at first glance. Consider, however, the fact that Daniel lived well into the Persian empire and was a man of great stature in that government. Now Daniel would surely have taken pains as nearly as possible to bring his book up to date and to have kept it so in case certain portions had been written earlier during the days of Babylon. Daniel would not want to leave his book for a new generation of Jewish exiles in the Persian era cumbered with a lot of antiquated terms which would need interpretation for the generation which knew only Persian terms. The use of Persian words by Daniel certainly lends no credence to the liberal theory that an unknown author of the Maccabean era wrote the book and used the pseudonym, Daniel.

Satrap literally means "kingdom-guardian" and according to Gesenius means, ". . . the governors or viceroys of the large provinces among the ancient Persians . . . being in the provinces the representatives of the sovereign, whose state and splendor they also rivalled." Daniel is using a Persian term in Nebuchadnezzar's day to describe some official who would be immediately next to the king in rank—a "prince" or an immediate lieutenant of the king. Daniel probably was a *satrap*. The other official titles probably descend in rank down from the satrap to the sheriff.

v. 4-7 . . . AT WHAT TIME YE HEAR . . . WHOSO FALLETH NOT DOWN AND WORSHIPPETH SHALL . . . BE CAST INTO THE MIDST OF A BURNING FIERY FURNACE . . . The individual musical instruments are enumerated: *cornet* (horn of a beast made into a musical horn); *flute* (to whistle, suggests an instrument with a shrill sound); *harp* (or zither, a stringed instrument); *sackbut* (a triangular board with short strings which gave off high-pitched notes); *lyre* (a stringed instrument with twenty strings); *psaltery* (another stringed instrument of triangular shape); *dulcimer* (trans-

lated by some "bagpipe" whether like the Scotch or not is unknown); *and all kinds of music* (may have been percussion instruments of all kinds), from the Greek *sumphonia* (symphony).

Critics claim that here we find Greek words in the text of Daniel in the names of at least three of these musical instruments and therefore, the book of Daniel must have been written at least as late as Alexander's Greece (approx. 330 B.C.). Leupold offers the most complete argument against this claim. To assume that Greek words would begin to appear in Hebrew or Aramaic only after Alexander's Greek empire had been established is to ignore historical evidence which points to contacts with the Greeks before Nebuchadnezzar's time. (a) Relations between Assyria (which empire preceded even the Babylonian) and Greece were established already before the beginning of the Assyrian Empire had its peak; (b) Ionian Greeks established merchantile connections very early as the Assyrian population began crowding the Semitic peoples toward Asia Minor; (c) From very early times Sinope (on the Black Sea) was an outpost of trade between Assyria and Greece; (d) in the Assyrian army of Esarhaddon (682 B.C.) as well as later in the Babylonian army of Nebuchadnezzar, Greek mercenary troops were found; (e) in the very early musical and philosophical culture of Greece we find influences of Semitic, Assyrian and Babylonian culture; (f) finally, if Daniel had been written in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, it would be very difficult to explain *why so few words of Greek origin occur in the Aramaic of Daniel.*

Young writes, ". . . as we know from recent archaeological discoveries, there was not a century of the Iron Age during which objects of Greek origin, mostly ceramic in character, were not being brought into Syria and Palestine. Greek traders and mercenaries were familiar in Egypt and throughout Western Asia from the early seventh century on, if not earlier. As early as the sixth century B.C. the coasts of Syria and Palestine were dotted with Greek ports and trading emporia, several of which have been discovered during the past five years."

One can imagine the unharmonious din that would be caused at the shrieking, blowing and thrumming of such a diverse collection of instruments. But the "sound" was not intended to furnish a soothing symphony for cultured critics. It was to serve as a very impressive *signal* that the time had come to worship the king's image.

The *furnace* was probably a furnace used commercially as a lime-kiln, or brick-kiln. Eastern potentates of that day were accustomed to practice methods of cruel punishment for the slightest disobedience to their commands. Refusal to do homage to the image, since it was erected by the king and for his glory, would be regarded as equivalent to treason to the state. No heathen of any race or language would have scruples against doing homage to another god or image since it simply involved the acknowledgement that the gods of Babylon were at that time more powerful than their own gods. But for devout Jews to worship this statue would have been a violation of the first principle of their religion that there is a Living God and He is One God and The Only True God.

A traveller of some three centuries ago (1671-77) by the name of Chardin went to the territory of Persia and noted that two furnaces of fire were kept burning for a month for consuming those who overcharged for food.

The religious implications of this event are rather incidental compared with the political significance. Yet the Jews who were firm in their faith had no alternative but to desist.

The question always arises, where was Daniel? The following text indicates that only the three Hebrew companions of Daniel were arrested and thrown into the furnace of flaming fire. As a matter of fact, we do not know why there is no mention of Daniel in this chapter, and it is pure conjecture to state otherwise. We would conjecture, however, that Daniel might have been on some official mission away from the immediate vicinity of the Plain of Dura and his mission was of such importance that his presence at the great image was excused by the king.

The love of the Babylonians for music is recorded in Isaiah 14:11; Psalms 137:3; Herodotus 1:191.

QUIZ

1. What was the size of the image made by Nebuchadnezzar?
2. Where is the Plain of Dura?
3. What is a satrap?
4. What is a dulcimer?
5. What kind of furnace was probably to be used for traitors?
6. Why would doing homage to a new god not bother any heathen of that day?

b. PERNICIOUS DENOUNCEMENT

TEXT: 3:8-12

8. Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and brought accusation against the Jews.
9. They answered and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king, 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 music, shall fall down and worship the golden image;
11. and whoso falleth not down and worshipping, shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.
12. There are certain Jews whom thou hast appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

QUERIES

- a. Who were the Chaldeans who brought accusation?
- b. Why their accusation?

PARAPHRASE

During this very time some of the Chaldeans, the leading class of court wisemen, came before the king and maliciously accused the Jews of disobedience to the king's edict.

They said, O king, Hail, live forever! You made a royal decree that everyone must fall down and worship the golden image at the signal of all the musical instruments playing together. Your edict was that anyone who refuses will be thrown into a flaming furnace. But there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in places of high position of government in the province of Babylon, who have defied you and they refuse to serve your gods and to worship the golden image you set up.

COMMENT

v. 8 . . . CERTAIN CHALDEANS . . . BROUGHT ACCUSATION . . . The "Chaldeans" as we learned before were a prominent class of court astrologers or wisemen (cf. 2:2ff). They held high positions of influence in government and, as in almost every human organization—especially civil structures, there is a great amount of jealousy and status seeking. There is a common Semitic expression in the Aramaic text here which translated literally reads, ". . . they devoured the pieces of the Jews . . ." and would be better translated, ". . . they accused the Jews with malice aforethought . . ." Jealousy and envy over the quick promotion and success of the Hebrew youths motivated the Chaldeans throughout. Their wounded vanity and unreasoning jealousy is made to look like a patriotic disclosure as the words of accusation fall from their lips.

v. 9-12 . . . CERTAIN JEWS . . . SERVE NOT THY GODS . . . The accusation is also made to sound like a charge of ingratitude. Here the king has honored these men by appointment to high office and they will not even so much as return the honor by doing homage to the golden image the king has made.

QUIZ

1. Why do we think the accusation against the Jews was motivated by envy?
2. How did the Chaldeans make their accusation sound patriotic?
3. Why do we think they made the charge sound like the Jews were ungrateful?

c. PROFESSION OF DEDICATION

TEXT: 3:13-18

- 13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king.
- 14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said unto them, Is it of purpose, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that ye serve not my god, 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 music, 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?
- 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need 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 thy 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.

QUERIES

- a. What did Nebuchadnezzar mean by his question to the three youths?
- b. Why did they "have no need to answer" the king in this matter?
- c. Does their answer exhibit a lack of faith in God?

PARAPHRASE

Then Nebuchadnezzar, in a furious rage, ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought in before him. As incredible as it is, is it still true, he asked, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Adebnego, that you are refusing to serve my

gods or to worship the golden image I set up? There must be some misunderstanding on your part so I will give you one more chance. When the musical instruments are played, giving the signal, if you fall down and worship the statue, all will be well. But if you refuse, you will be thrown into a flaming furnace within the hour. And what god can deliver you out of my hands then? The three Hebrew youths replied, O Nebuchadnezzar, if we went into lengthy explanations you would not understand, therefore, there is no need for us to make such an answer. Either our God will deliver us and the issues will then be cleared up—for our God is well able to deliver us from any circumstances—or else, for reasons best known to Him, He will not deliver us. But in either case, please understand, O King, we will not alter our position nor serve your gods nor worship the golden image which you set up.

COMMENT

v. 13-14 . . . NEBUCHADNEZZAR IN HIS RAGE AND FURY COMMANDED TO BRING SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABED-NEGO . . . The king is incredulous! He cannot believe that anyone would defy his royal edict—least of all three foreigners placed in such high positions by his special favor. Their apparent ingratitude shocked him at first and then spurred him into a furious rage. The phrase “Is it of purpose . . .” would be better translated “Is it true . . .” At least the king is fair enough to give the three men an opportunity to answer for themselves. Nebuchadnezzar must have recognized the envy and jealousy behind the accusations made by the Chaldeans.

v. 15 NOW IF YE BE READY . . . BUT IF YE WORSHIP NOT . . . The king is also ready to give them a second chance to obey the royal edict. But that is all. If they do not worship the next time they hear all the musical instruments giving the signal to do so, they shall be speedily (that very hour) cast into the flaming furnace. Then, boastingly, what god can protect you from my power? It would seem that Nebuchadnezzar had already seen sufficient evidence of the power of the Hebrew God that he would have spoken with some

restraint. But it is easy to forget if one does not believe with all the heart in the first place.

v. 16-18 . . . WE HAVE NO NEED TO ANSWER THEE IN THIS MATTER . . . This is not an answer of insolence. It is an answer of reality. The Hebrew lads know that due to the king's spiritual ignorance and blindness extensive explanations of their reasons for obedience to Jehovah-God and disobedience to paganism would be useless. There is no need of lengthy explanations because either God will deliver them from the fire and the whole issue of who is the most powerful, Nebuchadnezzar or Jehovah, will be cleared up, or else, for reasons best know to God, he will not deliver them from the fire. In either case, they are not going to worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar. They were wholly committed to the will of God as they knew it. Whatever the consequence of obeying His will, they were persuaded it would serve His purposes. They have no revelation that God will certainly work a miracle on their behalf and protect them from the furnace. All they know is that His word prohibits worshipping idols and His word promises divine approval and salvation ultimately to those who commit themselves to doing His will. These Hebrew lads did not lack faith in God. They exemplify the most complete, unreserved faith of the Old Testament saints.

QUIZ

1. Why did Nebuchadnezzar give the Hebrew lads a second chance?
2. What is Nebuchadnezzar's boast?
3. Is the answer of the Hebrew lads one of fatalism or faith?
4. Did the Hebrew lads know God was going to deliver them miraculously?

d. PERFECT DELIVERANCE

TEXT: 3:19-25

19. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach,

- and Abed-nego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated.
- 20 And he commanded certain mighty men that 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 hosen, their tunics, and their mantles, and their outer garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.
- 22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that 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 Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste: he spake and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.
- 25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the aspect of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

QUERIES

- a. Why heat the furnace seven times hotter than before?
- b. What caused the soldiers of the king to fall into the flames?
- c. Who was the fourth person in the furnace?

PARAPHRASE

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury and his face was distorted with rage. At once he commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be bound by certain of his most powerful soldiers and thrown into a flaming furnace which he had ordered to be fired up seven times hotter than it was before. The three Hebrew youths were then bound up securely hand and foot with all their fine regalia of boots, leggings, caps and robes on, and cast into the very center

of the flaming furnace. Driven by the fury of the king's anger, the soldiers were in such haste they did not take precautions concerning the intensity of the leaping flames and as they shoved the Hebrew lads into the furnace they themselves were burned to death by the flames. After the three Hebrew lads had fallen into the furnace, king Nebuchadnezzar bent over to look into the aperture but he rose to his feet quickly with astonishment on his face. He said to his counsellors, Did we not cast three men bound hand and foot into that flaming furnace? They answered, Indeed we did, O King. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, Look! I see four men loose, walking around in the middle of that inferno, and none of them are burned. The fourth man in there is like a son of the gods.

COMMENT

v. 19-21 . . . COMMANDED THAT THEY SHOULD HEAT THE FURNACE SEVEN TIMES MORE THAN IT WAS WONT TO BE HEATED . . . Their vow of resolution after being offered a second chance angered the king to the extreme. He was hot with anger. His face was distorted with rage. His command to heat it "seven times more . . ." is a figure of speech much like our "ten times as much" or "hundred times more." It would be impossible to measure precisely when the heat was exactly seven times greater.

The furnaces resembled our present day lime kilns. They were stone or brick, open at the top and approachable by an elevated path or inclined plane because the kiln was built against a hillside from which the approach was made. At the bottom there must have been an opening that was large enough to enable men to peer into the flames if they stooped or got down on their knees.

The three Hebrew lads had appeared, evidently, at this occasion of state dressed in their finest apparel. Ordinarily, their finery would be stripped off before committing them to the furnace. In this case, however, due to the urgency of the king's command, the victims were taken just as they were, bound hand and foot, and cast into the roaring inferno.

The description of their apparel begins with boots, trousers, caps and ends with robes. They were cast into the flames fully clothed. Clothing would serve as extremely combustible fuel to feed the flames and serve to make the burning-up of the persons faster.

v. 22-23 . . . BECAUSE THE KING'S COMMANDMENT WAS URGENT, AND THE FURNACE EXCEEDING HOT, THE FLAME OF THE FIRE SLEW THOSE MEN . . . The king's order given with furious rage written all over his countenance and pouring forth from his mouth spurred his powerful soldiers to care-less and fatal haste. They rushed headlong toward the opening of the furnace on the top close enough to hurl their victims in but they went too close and the leaping, licking flames, roared out from that inferno many times hotter than ever before and burned the soldiers to death. They succeeded, however, in casting the Hebrew men into the very center of that furnace. The fact that the soldiers were burned to death instantly when they merely came close to the flames and the fact that the Hebrew men did not even have the smell of smoke upon them makes this miracle most outstanding.

v. 24-25 . . . DID WE NOT CAST THREE MEN . . . INTO THE . . . FIRE? . . . LO, I SEE FOUR MEN . . . WALKING IN THE . . . FIRE . . . AND THE . . . FOURTH IS LIKE A SON OF THE GODS. The king took up a position at a safe distance from the furnace, yet at a vantage point where he could stoop down and peer inside through the opening at the bottom of the furnace. His furious rage at being disobeyed by, in his estimation, these ingrateful Hebrews caused him to want to witness their execution. But instead of seeing them writhing in agony as they are roasted alive, he sees a scene which utterly astounds him! It is so astonishing he is incredulous. He asks his counselors for confirmation of the number of men cast into that inferno for he has counted an extra one. He sees, in fact, six amazing things. (1) he sees not three but four; (2) they are not bound but free; (3) they are not lying down or standing still but walking about; (4) they are not being consumed by the fire but are unhurt; (5) the appearance of the fourth was like unto

a son of the gods; (6) they were not frantically searching for a way of escape, but were evidently calmly resigned to let their God handle the situation.

The statement of Nebuchadnezzar, “. . . like a son of the gods. . .” concerning the fourth person he saw in the furnace is to be expected from a pagan king. The KJV translates the king’s statement, “. . . like the Son of God,” but that is not gramatically defensible. The literal meaning is “. . . son of deity,” and the Aramaic, in reproducing the sense of Nebuchadnezzar’s statement does so by the language of paganism. What the king saw was a being with super-natural qualities and appearance. The king was impressed with this being’s divine appearance and its superhuman abilities but speaks as a typical heathen when he likens the fourth person to a “son of the gods.” We believe the fourth person was an angel of the Lord, whether one of the angels of high rank or not is uncertain (cf. Dan. 10:13, 21, regarding Michael, the arch-angel). To hold that the fourth person was the pre-incarnate Son of God robs the incarnation, in our estimation, of its uniqueness and seems to contradict plain teaching of scripture that the appearance of the Son of God took place uniquely at His birth by the virgin Mary and His subsequent life (cf. John 1:1-18; Heb. 1:1-14). In the passage in Hebrews 1:1-14 we are told of God’s previous ministry to the fathers through the agency of angels and this is to emphasize the uniqueness of the ministry of the Son “in these last days.” God did many things through the agency of angels. We will discuss angels in a Special Study in connection with chapter ten.

QUIZ

1. Why was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury? How angry was he?
2. How hot was “seven times more than it was wont to be heated?”
3. Why were the soldiers burned to death?
4. Why mention the apparel of the three Hebrew men?
5. Name six things which caused the king to be astonished?
6. Who was the fourth person “like a son of the gods?”

e. PHILANTHROPIC DECREE

TEXT: 3:26-30

- 26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace: he spake and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came forth out of the midst of the fire.
- 27 And the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power upon their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their hosen changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.
- 28 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.
- 29 Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill; because there is no other god that is able to deliver after this sort.
- 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the province of Babylon.

QUERIES

- a. Why did Nebuchadnezzar call the Hebrew men out of the furnace?
- b. How did the Hebrew men "change the king's word?"
- c. Does the King's decree mean he now believes in Jehovah?

PARAPHRASE

Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the opening in the flaming furnace and shouted, Shadrach, Me-

shach and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God, Come out of there and Come here! So they came out of the furnace and approached the king. Then a great company of the king's princes, governors, captains, and counsellors crowded around them and saw that the fire had not even touched the Hebrew men—not a hair of their heads was singed; their shoes were not even scorched; there was not even the slightest smell of smoke on their persons! Then the king said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, for he sent his angel to deliver these servants who trusted him completely. By their trust and miraculous deliverance they have caused the king to cancel his decree concerning their execution. Their determination to be true to their God and not serve other gods was manifested when they willingly submitted their bodies to be burned alive. Therefore, I make this new decree, that any person of any nation, language, or culture who speaks a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be hacked limb from limb and his house publicly desecrated. No other God can do what this God does! So the king, from that time forward, favored these Hebrew young men and they were successful and prosperous because of the king's favor.

COMMENT

v. 26-27 . . . CAME FORTH OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE FIRE . . . THE FIRE HAD NO POWER UPON THEIR BODIES . . . Nebuchadnezzar saw that in spite of his royal authority and in spite of his having physically committed the Hebrew men to the furnace and in spite of the intensity of the flames these men were not going to be consumed. There was nothing left for the king to do but admit defeat and call them forth from the furnace. Stationing himself at a safe distance from the furnace he yelled over the roar of the flames that they should come out and stand before him.

As they stood before the king a great company of the king's officials gathered around them and were utterly amazed that not a hair on their head was singed and there was not even the slightest smell of smoke upon them. The shoes with which they walked upon the white-hot coals were

not scorched at all. Daniel wants to be understood by his future readers that a large body of reliable witnesses satisfied themselves as to the perfect deliverance from certain death experience by these three Hebrew men. Deliverance was so complete and supernatural that their clothing did not even smell of fire or smoke. Under natural circumstances one who has been anywhere near a fire will bear the odor of smoke on his person or clothing.

v. 28 NEBUCHADNEZZAR . . . SAID, BLESSED BE THE GOD OF SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABED-NEGO . . . Nebuchadnezzar has not only witnessed with his own eyes a stupendous physical miracle of deliverance but he has also been touched by the whole-hearted faith of these Hebrews. The king's immediate reaction is a word spoken in praise of the God of these Hebrews.

Yet, his manner of designating God as the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is the manner of a heathen polytheist. The king is merely admitting that their God, compared to other gods, has distinguished Himself by manifesting a power that is greater than any other god. So far it has not even occurred to the king to confess the Hebrew God as the Only True God and to denounce pagan gods as false.

That fourth person seen in the furnace by the king and formerly called by him "a son of the gods" is now called "His angel" by the king. This is to be expected since Babylonian religion was replete with doctrines of angels, demons, helping spirits and the like. As to the whereabouts of this fourth person we assume it returned to its heavenly abode.

Note the various impressions made on Nebuchadnezzar by these Hebrew men: (1) the complete "trust" or faith they had in their God—such faith has impressed more than one heathen potentate; (2) their deliverance had overruled the decree of the powerful Nebuchadnezzar—he was forced to admit defeat; (3) they were willing to surrender their physical bodies to apparent excruciating death by being burned alive rather than worship pagan deities.

Note further in his decree the king does not deny his own national gods but simply makes a decree in a negative way that no one should speak any thing remiss (error or

falsehood that would tend to lead the minds of men astray in regard to the things they have seen the God of the Hebrews demonstrate). Nebuchadnezzar does not decree, in a positive sense, that Jehovah is to be worshipped as the one and Only God.

The king's promised punishment for violation of this decree is exactly like that pronounced upon his own magicians should they fail to tell him his dream (cf. ch. 2).

v. 30 THEN THE KING PROMOTED . . . Leupold says the word "promoted" does not mean they were advanced to a new office in the structure of government but the word means the king "supported and favored them so that their position was made easier and their work more successful in spite of the opposition of those that begrudged them their success."

Keil notes that the incidents recorded in this chapter teach us "how the true worshipers of the Lord under the dominion of the world power could and would come into difficulties, imperiling life, between the demands of the lords of this world and the duties we owe to God. But we also learn that, if in these circumstances they remain faithful to their God, they will in a wonderful manner be protected by Him; while He will reveal His omnipotence so graciously that even the heathen world rulers will be constrained to recognize their God and give Him glory." (See our sermon at the end of this chapter for similar remarks).

QUIZ

1. Where was the king when he called for the Hebrew men to come out?
2. What happened to the fourth person in the furnace?
3. Why did Daniel note the many people who surrounded the Hebrew men upon their exit from the furnace?
4. What is the significance of mentioning that they did not even smell of fire?
5. Name at least three things about the Hebrew men's faith that amazed Nebuchadnezzar.
6. Why do we think the king is not a true believer in Jehovah?
7. What does this chapter teach us for today?

SERMON NUMBER THREE

"FOUR IN A FIERY FURNACE"

Text: Daniel 3

INTRODUCTION

I. CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE ARE CONNECTED

- A. Second chapter showed final outcome of growth and success of WORLD-POWER—the world-power must eventually crumble
- B. Yet, while its power lasts, must it not be feared by God's own because of the harm it can and will do to God's saints?
- C. Chapter Three answers, NO! He that is with us is greater than he that is with them!

II. CHAPTER THREE A STUMBLING BLOCK TO UNBELIEVERS

- A. Farrar calls the chapter "historic fiction"
 - 1. Then he says its purpose is "to inculcate the noblest truths . . ."
 - 2. and he says "always regarded it as one of the most precious among the narrative chapters of Scripture."
 - 3. also . . . "it is not only superb in its imaginative grandeur, but still more in the manner in which it sets for the piety of ultimate faithfulness."
- B. But a purely fictional or mythological deliverance is small comfort to a man who is confronted by a factual peril of death.
- C. If we have no guaranty of the truth of the account, we have no guaranty of the validity of any comfort we may draw from the account.
- D. I believe this is a valid, historically accurate account of a miraculous deliverance from death by fire . . . these were real men and the miracle really happened. It is referred to in Hebrews 11:34 ". . . quenched the power of fire . . ."

DANIEL

III. THERE ARE GREAT LESSONS HERE . . . THERE HAVE BEEN MANY PARALLELS TO SUCH PERSECUTION AND FAITH

- A. There are lessons on religion and the state; faith; God's power
- B. There is one recent parallel in John Noble who endured 12 years of persecution, lived by faith, and was miraculously delivered time and again in Russian prison camps.
- C. We have outlined the chapter for sermon purpose thus:
 - 1. Religion and The State 3:1-15
 - 2. Resistance and The Sanctified 3:16-23
 - 3. Rescue and the Sovereign 3:24-30

DISCUSSION

I. RELIGION AND THE STATE 3:1-15

- A. Nebuchadnezzar's image
 - 1. Probably after he had completed his major conquests and was feeling the magnitude and strength of his empire
 - 2. The image maybe copied from his dream to represent world-power established by himself
 - 3. Maybe represented one of his gods since heathen philosophy was that when they won victory their gods had triumphed over gods of those they had defeated
 - 4. It was 90 ft. high and 9 ft. wide, gold-plated (cf. Isa. 49:19)
 - 5. The sound of such a conglomeration of musical instruments did not exactly sound like a symphony but they were intended only to give an arresting signal designed to impress the hearers by their variety and their volume . . . this they did quite well
 - 6. Whatever its appearance and regardless of what is symbolized, all the officials of the kingdom were commanded to worship it.

FOUR IN A FIERY FURNACE

B. There are various attitudes world-power has taken toward religion, depending upon the attitudes of the state's governors

1. All the gods worshipped by others were to be recognized
2. New ones might be introduced by authority of the state
3. The gods which the state approved and acknowledged were to be honored by all
4. If any persons denied their existence, and their claims to homage, they were to be treated as enemies of the state.
5. These principles are followed even today by world-powers which are heathen, pagan and atheistic (for atheism is a religion and in Russia all who do not worship it are enemies of the state)
6. Russia has been committed for over 50 years to the proposition that the Living God is a myth; religion an opiate for oppressed working classes; after 1917 revolution 2/3 of all clergymen in Russia were executed; 4/5 of all church buildings closed or turned into museums for instruction in "scientific atheism." A prisoner related to John Noble his trial. After sentencing to 25 yrs. hard labor in Siberia his judges laughed and asked him if he believed in God; the prisoner replied he certainly did; the Russian judge then pointed to a picture of Stalin hanging on the wall and said, "That is our God, and the only God we have." BUT THREE YEARS LATER THEIR GOD WAS DEAD—DISHONORED IN DEATH AS SOON AS HIS BODY WAS COLD! China is even worse in its deification of Mao Tse Tung!
7. The three Hebrew children were experiencing the results of world-government perverting its God-ordained purpose . . . it was dictating what man should worship rather than protecting man's liberty to worship as he pleased.

C. The only proper attitude of world-power toward religion:

DANIEL

1. There is to be, on the subject of religion, perfect liberty to worship God in the manner that shall be most in accordance with the views of the individual himself, PROVIDED IN DOING IT HE DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH THE RIGHTS OR DISTURB THE WORSHIP OF OTHERS. State is not merely to tolerate exercise of religion, for toleration implies that state has right of control which it does not—the word is liberty.
2. The state is to protect all in the enjoyment of these equal rights. Its authority does not go beyond this. Its duty demands this.
3. For this reason Christians need to beware of their zeal to insist that the government take action to restore religion to the public school system. Forcing the government to such action might force the government to make laws regarding the establishment of a state-controlled religion.
4. A nation cannot be Christianized by force; and a Bible verse a day will not keep immorality away.
5. We should never expect the public school to do the job that parents and churches must do. We've been passing the buck for too long.
6. In Connellsville, Pa., citizens have taken the law into their own hands and defied the Supreme Court and the Constitution. Prayer is *compulsory* there now, no matter what the Supreme Court said. In fact, the Lord's Prayer and ten verses of Scripture are required each day, the same rite which was declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1963.
7. HOW CAN CHRISTIAN PEOPLE, WHO ARE CONSTANTLY BEWAILING THE BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND ORDER IN SOCIETY, DISREGARD THE HIGHEST COURT IN THE U.S.? EVEN IF WE DISAGREE, DOES THAT GIVE US THE PREROGATIVE TO DISOBEY? DO WE "RENDER UNTO CAESAR" ONLY WHEN WE AGREE WITH CAESAR?

FOUR IN A FIERY FURNACE

8. What the Supreme Court outlawed was state-controlled religious worship and requiring young people to worship in a way that was contrary to their consciences . . . IN FACT, CHILDREN CAN STILL READ THEIR BIBLES . . . TEACHERS CAN READ BIBLES TO THE CLASS FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES . . . BUT LET US NOT INSIST UPON STATE-CONTROLLED RELIGION!!!

II. RESISTANCE AND THE SANCTIFIED 3:16-23

A. Upon what basis did the three young men refuse to worship Nebuchadnezzar's idol?

1. Whole-hearted belief in the Living God
 - a. Whole-hearted belief is an intelligent belief. Not one of emotion alone.
 - b. It is not obstinacy. Obstinacy is where a man has made up his mind, and resolves to act, without any good reason or investigation of the evidences
2. Unhesitating determination to do what is right. Not what is expedient or popular, or lucrative, BUT WHAT IS RIGHT
3. With such convictions we will always do our God-given duty regardless of the consequences and put our trust in God believing that if He pleases He can protect us from danger.
4. There is no need for saying more than they said to the king. They believe that God will either deliver them and the issues will then be cleared up, or, for reasons best known to Him, He will not be able to deliver them—even at that they will not alter their position for even in their death they believe God's purposes will be served.
5. They were thrown into a fiery furnace whose heat was so hot it consumed the men who got close enough to throw them in.

B. When the pride of world-power is wounded or its authority threatened and it is not founded on the principles of the God-ordained liberties of its constituents, it persecutes.

D A N I E L

1. The three Hebrew youths were thrown into a fiery furnace whose heat was so hot it consumed the soldiers who were throwing them in
 2. John Noble writes: "I have seen Christianity under the most terrible persecution it has suffered since the days of Nero . . . and I am convinced it was God's will that I be a member of that persecuted Church for several years in order to testify that God is with it and is sustaining it."
 3. Brutal whippings; starvation for 15 days; solitary confinement for days in dungeons; working long hours in 50-70° below zero weather; 9000 people died of disease and starvation in 3 years in one camp alone; women raped and abused by guards; men sadistically tortured. One man, to keep from being sent to the mines, put his hand on a stool palm down, took a hatchet and chopped off all four fingers—the guards came and took the delirious man to the camp infirmary where the stumps were trimmed and sewed up without anesthetic and threw him in the dungeon for 60 days for sabotage.
- C. The viciousness and beastiality of the persecutions some of the sanctified have been called upon by the Lord to endure are almost beyond human comprehension
1. The early saints under Nero and successors: lighted as human torches to illuminate his chariot races; women and babies and old men unarmed thrown to face lions starved to death; forced to fight gladiators; made slaves and treated in most despicable manner
 2. The true believers who were persecuted by a Roman church which had become united with the state: hacked to pieces, hanged, torn limb from limb on a rack, flogged to death with a whip.
 3. Modern saints persecuted by Nazis, Communists in Russia, China and Cuba, and even here in the U.S.

FOUR IN A FIERY FURNACE

4. "Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. . ." 2 Tim. 3:12
5. ". . . a servant is not greater than his master . . . if they persecuted me, they will persecute you . . ." John 15:20
6. "persecution arises on account of the word . . ." Mt. 13:21
7. "You have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised . . ." Heb. 10:36

III. RESCUE AND THE SOVEREIGN 3:24-30

- A. ". . . the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment . . ." II Pet. 2:9
 1. The 3 Hebrew youths were rescued by an angel (not the Son of God) but some supernatural being sent by God. Nebuchadnezzar got the shock of his life. Not only were the 3 not harmed nor was there even upon them the smell of smoke but there was a FOURTH MAN IN THE FURNACE!
 2. Peter writes, ". . . the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer . . . Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right?" He continues, ". . . it is better to suffer for doing right, if that should be God's will, than for doing wrong."
 3. We are not to be surprised at any fiery ordeal for it has come to prove us . . . we are to rejoice to be able to share in Christ's sufferings because we know the spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. I Pet. 4:12ff Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.
 4. God has not promised to deliver every suffering saint by a miracle from physical harm. But it is better that we should not fear him who is able to destroy the body, but Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.
 5. We should not expect exact and perfect judgment to be enacted upon earth while we live here.

DANIEL

6. If the righteous were never persecuted, poor, hungered, many would believe not in God but in the "loaves which fill their bellies."
 7. While it is proper for God to miraculously save some saints in order to demonstrate His faithfulness—it would not be proper for Him to save all and thus have many coming to Him simply for the reward and not for the sake of who He is
- B. Examples of deliverance**
1. John Noble tells of a cell-mate of his father's in prison camp. This cell-mate was terrified he might be placed in a cell with non-christian. He miraculously stayed with Noble's father. He was starving to death and dying of disease—got down to 80 lbs. and could not even eat what little food they had. He constantly called for wife and daughter. Noble and his father prayed earnestly that the dying man might receive some word about his family. Very next day, a man from his home town, a neighbor was assigned to the very next cell. Upon receiving news that his family was safe, this man prayed, thanking God, and saying he was now ready to die if it was God's will. **BUT HE BEGAN TO IMPROVE, REGAINED HIS HEALTH, AND TWO YEARS LATER WAS RELEASED AND REJOINED HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER.**
 2. J. Russell Morse's accounts of prison and deliverance are accounts of modern day acts of the providence of God in rescuing his saints.
 3. You have heard of others, I am sure. **THERE IS NO DOUBT ABOUT IT—GOD KNOWS HOW TO RESCUE THE GODLY FROM TRIAL!**
 4. But, it is not always God's purpose to rescue from physical harm. Sometimes His purpose is better served by suffering and death. **WHAT WE MUST BELIEVE AND TRUST IS THAT WHEN GOD'S PURPOSES ARE SERVED IN OUR LIVES, WE WILL ALWAYS BE VICTORIOUS.** "Rejoice and be exceedingly glad when men shall persecute you and say all manner of evil against you for my names sake, for so persecuted they the prophets before you."

CONCLUSION

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S REACTION REMINDS ME OF ONE OF JOHN NOBLE'S MOST TOUCHING STORIES

Date: November, 1950. Place: Vorkuta slave labor camp. Three nuns, of which church and order Mr. Noble was un-informed, assigned to work at making bricks for construction work throughout the whole Arctic area of Russia.

The nuns told their guards they regarded doing any work for the communist regime as working for the Devil and they were servants of God and they were not going to work despite any threats they might make.

They were put on punishment rations—black bread and rancid soup, day after day. Each morning they were ordered to go out to the clay pits in the brick factory and each morning they refused. They were placed in strait jackets—hands tied in back of them, then the rope with which their wrists were bound was passed down around their ankles and drawn up tight—their feet were pulled up behind them and their shoulders wrenched backward and downward into a position of excruciating pain. NOT A SOUND OF PROTEST ESCAPED THEIR LIPS.

Then the commandant ordered water poured over them so that the cotton material in the strait jackets would shrink . . . they moaned softly and lapsed into unconsciousness. This was done more than once. Kept in this state for 2 hours.

The commandant decided they were either going to work or he was going to have to kill them in the attempt to make them do so. They would not so he ordered that they be taken out in the bitter wind of the Arctic winter and left to stand there immobile all day long to watch the other women work. The guard went over expecting to see them frozen to death but found them kneeling, praying, relaxed and warm.

At this the commandant ordered their gloves and caps be removed so they would be exposed to the full fury of the wind. All through the 8 hour day they knelt on that windy hilltop in prayer. Three days in a row they were thus exposed—and while those working with boots and caps and

gloves were complaining of frostbite and frozen feet—not one indication of frostbite could be found in the nuns.

News of what was happening spread throughout the camp. Everyone was murmuring that indeed God had brought a miracle to pass. Even hardened MVD men found excuses to come by the brick factory and take a furtive look at the three figures on the hill. Women working down in the pits crossed themselves and nervously mumbled prayers. Even the commandant was sorely disturbed. IF NOT A RELIGIOUS MAN, HE WAS AT LEAST A SOMEWHAT SUPERSTITIOUS ONE AND HE KNEW WELL ENOUGH WHEN HE WAS WITNESSING THE HAND OF A POWER THAT WAS NOT OF THIS EARTH!

By the fourth day, the guards themselves were afraid of the unearthly power they were witnessing and they flatly refused to touch them or have anything more to do with them. The commandant was afraid to go and order them out into the hill any more. So they were not disturbed in their prayers, and were taken off punishment rations.

When I left Vorkuta 4 years later, those nuns were still at the brick factory and none of them had done a day's work for the communist regime. They were regarded with awe and respect. The guards were under instructions not to touch them or disturb them. They were preparing their own food and even making their own clothes. Their devotions were carried on in their own way and they seemed at peace and contented. Though prisoners, they were spiritually free. NO ONE IN THE SOVIET UNION HAD SUCH FREEDOM OF WORSHIP AS THEY!

Later on, when I had the opportunity as a locker-room attendant for the MVD men to talk with some of the more hardened Russian Communists about religion, not one failed to mention the Miracle of the Nuns.

YES, GOD KNOWS HOW TO DELIVER THE GODLY.

EXAMINATION THREE

REFUTATIONS

(Answer the following by giving the argument which will correct the statement)

EXAMINATION THREE

1. This image of Nebuchadnezzar was erected because of God's command to do so. Refute!
2. The three Hebrew friends of Daniel did not worship the image, but Daniel did. Refute!
3. The fourth person Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fiery furnace was Jesus Christ. Refute!

ASSOCIATIONS

(Associate the person or thing of column 1 with the correct parallel of column 2)

1	2
dulcimer	location of the image
image	Cyrus
Meshach	Abed-nego
hosen	Daniel
angel	Mishael
satrap	tree
sheriff	bagpipe
Dura	triangular board instrument
cubit	kingdom guardian
furnace	Nebuchadnezzar
sackbut	kiln
	lesser official
	boots
	a son of the gods
	city of Babylon
	measurement

MEMORIZATIONS

(Fill in the blanks:)

Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, Blessed be the _____ of Shadrach, _____, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his _____, and delivered his servants that _____ their bodies, that they might not _____ nor _____ any god, except their own God.

EXPLANATIONS

1. Explain the probable reason Nebuchadnezzar commanded that all people worship his image.
2. Explain why they had the Hebrew men thrown into the fiery furnace.
3. Explain how the guards were consumed by the fire.
4. Explain the deliverance of the three Hebrew youths.
5. Explain the reaction of Nebuchadnezzar to this miracle.

CHAPTER FOUR

I. DESPOT'S DISGRACE—4:1-37

a. EMPEROR'S EPHEMERAL EXCURSION
AND EDICT

TEXT: 4:1-6

- 1 Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all the peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied unto you.
- 2 It hath seemed good unto me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God hath wrought toward me.
- 3 How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his domain is from generation to generation.
- 4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace.
- 5 I saw a dream which made me afraid; and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.
- 6 Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream.

QUERIES

- a. Is it possible that Nebuchadnezzar would make such a humiliating confession?