

The Golden Image

Some time elapsed between the dream and the construction of the image. Nonetheless, it seems that the king can no longer forget the dream and the fact that Babylon is doomed to be replaced by other powers. Not satisfied with being only the head of gold, the king wants to be represented by an entire image of gold in order to communicate to his subjects that his kingdom will endure throughout history.

This attitude of pride calls to mind the builders of the Tower of Babel, who, in their arrogance, attempt to challenge God Himself. No less arrogant is Nebuchadnezzar here. He has accomplished much as ruler of Babylon, and he cannot live with the idea that his kingdom will eventually pass away. Thus, in an effort at his own self-exaltation, he builds an image to evoke his power and thereby assess the loyalty of his subjects. Although it may not be clear whether the image is intended to represent the king or a deity, we should keep in mind that in antiquity the lines separating politics from religion were often blurred, if they existed at all.

We should remember, too, that Nebuchadnezzar has had two opportunities to get acquainted with the true God. First, he tests the young Hebrews and finds them ten times wiser than the other sages of Babylon. Then, after all other experts have failed to remind him of his dream, Daniel reports to him the thoughts of his mind, the dream, and its interpretation. Finally, the king recognizes the superiority of the God of Daniel. But surprisingly enough, those previous theology lessons do not prevent Nebuchadnezzar from reverting back to idolatry. Why? Most likely, pride. Sinful human beings resist acknowledging the fact that their material and intellectual accomplishments are vanity and are doomed to disappear. We may at times act like little “Nebuchadnezzars” as we pay too much attention to our accomplishments and forget how meaningless they can be in the face of eternity.

The king declared to the three Hebrew youth, if “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?” The youth said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 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 thine hand, O king. 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... .” (Daniel 3:15-19). Those faithful youth were cast into the fire, but God manifested His power for the deliverance of His servants. One like unto the Son of God walked with them in the midst of the flame, and when they were brought forth, not even the smell of fire had passed on them.—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 149.

To bow down when in prayer to God is the proper attitude to occupy. This act of worship was required of the three Hebrew captives in Babylon... . But such an act was homage to be rendered to God alone—the Sovereign of the world, the Ruler of the universe; and these three Hebrews refused to give such honor to any idol even though composed of pure gold. In doing so, they would, to all intents and purposes, be bowing to the king of Babylon. Refusing to do as the king had commanded, they suffered the penalty, and were cast into the burning fiery furnace.—*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 312.

Force is the last resort of every false religion. At first it tries attraction, as the king of Babylon tried the power of music and outward show. If these attractions, invented by men inspired by Satan, failed to make men worship the image, the hungry flames of the furnace

were ready to consume them. So it will be now. The papacy has exercised her power to compel men to obey her, and she will continue to do so. We need the same spirit that was manifested by God's servants in the conflict with paganism.—Ellen G. White Comments, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 976.

None but God can subdue the pride of man's heart. We cannot save ourselves. We cannot regenerate ourselves. In the heavenly courts there will be no song sung, To me that loved myself, and washed myself, redeemed myself, unto me be glory and honor, blessing and praise. But this is the keynote of the song that is sung by many here in this world. They do not know what it means to be meek and lowly in heart; and they do not mean to know this, if they can avoid it. The whole gospel is comprised in learning of Christ, His meekness and lowliness.

What is justification by faith? It is the work of God in laying the glory of man in the dust, and doing for man that which it is not in his power to do for himself.—*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 456.

The Call to Worship

The image of gold standing on the plain of Dura, whose name in Akkadian means "walled place", gives the impression of a vast sanctuary. As if it were not enough, the furnace nearby can well evoke an altar. Babylonian music is to be part of the liturgy. Seven types of musical instruments are listed, as if to convey the completeness and effectiveness of the adoration protocol.

Today, we are bombarded from every side by calls to adopt new lifestyles, new ideologies, and to abandon our commitment to the authority of God as expressed in His Word and to surrender our allegiance to contemporary successors of the Babylonian empire. The allure of the world at times seems overwhelming, but we should remind ourselves that our ultimate allegiance belongs to the Creator God.

According to the prophetic calendar, we are living in the last days of earth's history. Revelation 13 announces that the inhabitants of the earth will be called to worship the image of the beast. That entity will cause "all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads" (Rev. 13:16).

Six categories of people are said to give allegiance to the image of the beast: "small and great, rich and poor, free and slave". The number of the beast, which is 666, also emphasizes six. This shows that the image erected by Nebuchadnezzar is just an illustration of what the eschatological Babylon will do in the last days (see Dan. 3:1 for the imagery of six and sixty). Therefore, we do well to pay close attention to what transpires in this narrative and how God sovereignly directs the affairs of the world.

A severe test came to ... these youth when Nebuchadnezzar issued a proclamation, calling upon all the officers of the kingdom to assemble at the dedication of the great image, and at the sound of the musical instruments, to bow down and worship it. Should any fail of doing this, they were immediately to be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. The worship of this image had been brought about by the wise men of Babylon in order to make the Hebrew youth join in their idolatrous worship. They were beautiful singers, and the Chaldeans wanted them to forget their God and accept the worship of the Babylonian idols.

The appointed day came, and at the sound of the music, the vast company that had assembled at the king's command "fell down and worshiped the golden image." But these faithful young men would not bow down.—*My Life Today*, p. 68.

Through the Hebrew captives the Lord was made known to the heathen in Babylon. This idolatrous nation was given a knowledge of the kingdom the Lord was to establish, and through His power maintain against all the power and craft of Satan. Daniel and his fellow-companions, Ezra and Nehemiah, and many others were witnesses for God in their captivity. The Lord scattered them among the kingdoms of the earth that their light might shine brightly amid the black darkness of heathenism and idolatry. To Daniel God revealed the light of His purposes, which had been hidden for many generations. He chose that Daniel should see in vision the light of His truth, and reflect this light on the proud kingdom of Babylon. On the despot king was permitted to flash light from the throne of God. Nebuchadnezzar was shown that the God of heaven was ruler over all the monarchs and kings of earth. His name was to go forth as the God over all gods. God desired Nebuchadnezzar to understand that the rulers of earthly kingdoms had a ruler in the heavens. God's faithfulness in rescuing the three captives from the flames and vindicating their course of action showed His wonderful power.—Ellen G. White Comments, in *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1169.

Daniel and his companions had a conscience void of offense toward God. But this is not preserved without a struggle. What a test was brought on the three associates of Daniel when they were required to worship the great image set up by the King Nebuchadnezzar in the plains of Dura! Their principles forbade them to pay homage to the idol, for it was a rival to the God of heaven. They knew that they owed to God every faculty they possessed, and while their hearts were full of generous sympathy toward all men, they had a lofty aspiration to prove themselves entirely loyal to their God.—*In Heavenly Places*, p. 149.

The Test of Fire

For the three Hebrews, the image worship imposed by the king is a blatant counterfeit of the temple worship in Jerusalem, which they experienced in their earlier years. Although they hold offices in the empire and are loyal to the king, their allegiance to God sets a limit on their human loyalty. They are certainly willing to continue to serve the king as faithful administrators; however, they cannot join the ceremony.

Read Exodus 20:3-6 and Deuteronomy 6:4. What do these texts convey that surely influenced the stand these men took?

Following the instructions issued by the king, all the people at the sound of the musical instruments bow and worship the golden image. Only the three — Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego — dare to disobey the king. Immediately, some Babylonians bring the matter to the king's attention. The accusers seek to enrage the king by saying: (1) it was the king himself who put these three young men over the province of Babylon; (2) the Jewish men do not serve the gods of the king; and (3) they do not worship the gold image that the king had set up (Dan. 3:12). But in spite of his fury against them, the king offers the three men a second chance. The king is willing to repeat the whole procedure so that these men can retract their position and worship the image. Should they refuse, they will be thrown into the fiery furnace. And Nebuchadnezzar closes his appeal with a most arrogant claim: "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Dan. 3:15).

Endowed with supernatural courage, they respond to the king: "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. 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" (Dan. 3:17, 18).

Jehovah, the eternal, self-existent, uncreated One, Himself the Source and Sustainer of all, is alone entitled to supreme reverence and worship. Man is forbidden to give to any other object the first place in his affections or his service. Whatever we cherish that tends to lessen our love for God or to interfere with the service due Him, of that do we make a god.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them."

The second commandment forbids the worship of the true God by images or similitudes. Many heathen nations claimed that their images were mere figures or symbols by which the Deity was worshiped, but God has declared such worship to be sin. The attempt to represent the Eternal One by material objects would lower man's conception of God. The mind, turned away from the infinite perfection of Jehovah, would be attracted to the creature rather than to the Creator. And as his conceptions of God were lowered, so would man become degraded.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 305, 306.

The Hebrew worthies could not be consumed, because the form of the fourth, the Son of God, was with them. So in the day of the coming of the Lord, smoke and flame will be powerless to harm the righteous. Those who are united with the Lord will escape unscathed. Earthquakes, hurricanes, flame, and flood cannot injure those who are prepared to meet their Saviour in peace. But those who rejected our Saviour, and scourged and crucified Him, will be among those who will be raised from the dead to behold His coming in the clouds of heaven, attended by the heavenly host—ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.—*The Upward Look*, p. 261.

A confession of Christ means something more than bearing testimony in [prayer] meeting.

We have a different confession to make from that which we have made; and we shall have to make it under different circumstances. The three Hebrews were called upon to confess Christ in the face of the burning fiery furnace... .

If you are called to go through the fiery furnace for Christ's sake, Jesus will be at your side. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." Isaiah 43:2.—*Our High Calling*, p. 358.

The three Hebrews declared to the whole nation of Babylon their faith in Him whom they worshiped. They relied on God. In the hour of their trial they remembered [His] promise... . And in a marvelous manner their faith in the living Word had been honored in the sight of all. The tidings of their wonderful deliverance were carried to many countries by the representatives of the different nations that had been invited by Nebuchadnezzar to the dedication. Through the faithfulness of His children, God was glorified in all the earth.—*Reflecting Christ*, p. 370.

Overview of Daniel 3 - From Furnace to Palace

The building of a huge golden image - Daniel 3:1-7

Daniel 3:1-7 Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar ordered the construction of a huge golden image?

What other stories in the Bible illustrate a desire to trust in human strength rather than trust in God?

Why was Nebuchadnezzar so slow to learn the importance of trusting fully in the God of heaven?

The command to worship the golden image - Daniel 3:8-15

Think of other times in history when people have been forced to worship in a way that was contrary to the clear teachings of the Bible. Who is behind all such forced idolatry? (see Matthew 4:8-10, Isaiah 14:12-14)

Why is this story recorded in Daniel 3 particularly relevant for our lives today? Revelation 13:11-18

The test of fire

Daniel 3:16-18 What impresses you as you hear the testimony of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego?

Daniel 3:19-23 Why did the attitude of Nebuchadnezzar change from respect to rage?

What details in this story emphasize the severity of this fiery test?

Share a time when your loyalty and faithfulness to God faced a fiery test.

The Fourth Man in the fire - Daniel 3:24-25

Daniel 3:26-27 How does the presence of the Fourth Man in the fiery furnace impact those who witness the scene?

Share some promises in the Bible where God assures us He will be with us as we face the fiery trials of life. Isaiah 43:2, Psalm 50:15, etc.

Sometimes God delivers us from the fire. Other times He delivers us through the fire. Still other times He delivers us after the fire. Share examples of those who faced death unafraid, trusting in God that their ultimate deliverance was sure.

The response of King Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 3:28 What are your thoughts about Nebuchadnezzar's confession?

Daniel 3:29-30 What are your thoughts about Nebuchadnezzar's two declarations?

The gift of courageous faith

Hebrews 11:1-6 How can we develop courageous faith like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego?

Ephesians 2:8 – courageous faith is a gift of God

What lesson can we learn from the absence of Daniel in this story?