

Lessons from Daniel 3

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In Daniel 2 we encountered a visual image that describes the future history of the world as a sequence of kingdoms. Daniel 3 also focuses on an image, but this time it is not an image revealed by God but an image erected by Nebuchadnezzar. This image brings about a crisis.

I. Discussion of the Chapter

A. The Image and Worship

1. **Verses 1–7**—*What are the differences between the image in Daniel 2 and the image in Daniel 3?*

Daniel 2

- Shown in a dream
- Revelation of God
- Prediction about the future
- Made of different materials
- God as highest authority
- Not related to worship

Daniel 3

- Real image
- Initiative of the king
- Wishful thinking about the future
- Made of pure gold
- The king as highest authority
- Worship of the image

Daniel 2 indicates that Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom is the golden head. However, it seems that the king was not content to be the golden head. The entire image had to be made of gold to suggest that his kingdom would be glorious, perpetual, and not followed by an inferior empire. In light of his statement in Daniel 2:47, his action in Daniel 3 must be understood as rebellion against God and hubris.

2. **Verses 2, 3**—The dignitaries of the kingdom are summoned. Daniel and his friends belonged to the government officials (Dan 3:12), but Daniel himself was not present when the events took place. He may have been on some kind of mission for the king.

3. **Verses 4–6**—*What would worship of the image express?*

- Recognition of the king as supreme lord and submission to him
- Recognition of the king as a kind of god
- Denial of the true God
- Rejection of the first and second commandments of the Decalogue
- Recognition of the Babylonian gods as superior to other gods and the true God

4. **Verse 6**—*Why is the death penalty for the case of disobedience to the king's command announced right away?*

- Disobedience is a sign of disloyalty and rebellion and is suppressed immediately in totalitarian regimes.
 - Toleration of disobedience would endanger the absolute authority of the king.
 - The unity of the empire would be jeopardized.
5. **Verse 7**—The multitudes worship the image. However, truth is not necessarily found with the majority. It requires courage and strength of character to not join the questionable or wrong decisions of the masses and go against the tide.

B. The Accusation

1. **Verses 8–12**—Daniel’s friends are accused of disloyalty. There seems to be some sort of jealousy among their accusers and even an indirect criticism of the king’s former action to put foreigners, prisoners of war, into governmental positions. The issue is brought directly to the king, and it is before the king that the three friends have to answer and defend themselves.

How are they described by their enemies?

- They are Jews, foreigners of a different religion, and therefore people of suspicion.
- In spite of their position (Dan 2:49) they refuse to obey orders and are disloyal. They are also ungrateful to their royal benefactor.
- They are opposed to the king and his gods.

C. Dialogue with Nebuchadnezzar

1. **Verses 13–15**—*How is the King described?*

- Extreme furiousness
- Serious intimidations
- Nevertheless willingness to grant a second chance
- Pride and a feeling of superiority with regard to the God of the Hebrews
- Challenging the true God
- Disbelief that God would be able to save the three friends. It seems that in his opinion his gods are more powerful than Yahweh.
- Lust for power: immediate death penalty for alleged rebellion

2. **Verses 16–18**—*What about Daniel’s friends impresses us?*

- Calmness and equanimity
- Courage and boldness
- Faithfulness to their God
- Readiness to die for their convictions
- Faith in the omnipotence of God
- Submission to God’s will, no matter what it may mean
- Their understanding of God does not claim that believers are exempt of evil and challenges, or that God is obligated to save them from all danger. They do not believe they should let go of God in case He does not intervene. They do not believe in a kind of contract between God and them in the sense of “What you will do to me, I will do to you,” or “I am giving so that you will give.” Rather they have a personal relationship of trust and love with the Lord.

D. Execution of the Verdict

1. **Verses 19–22**— In his wrath the king orders the execution of his verdict. In this process his best warriors die. His order to heat the furnace seven times hotter may have been given to prevent the God of the Hebrews from saving His people. The furnace may have been one of the many kilns used in Babylon.

E. The Phenomenon in the Fiery Furnace

1. **Verses 23–25**—A phenomenon happens: although the soldiers outside the furnace are burnt, the three men inside the furnace do not die but freely walk around in the fire, and a fourth person joins them. His appearance is described as a son of the gods or the Son of God (vs. 28, 29 suggest the second option). God intervenes and saves His faithful servants. Early church fathers already understood this fourth person as Jesus Christ. The king is stunned.

F. Nebuchadnezzar’s Reaction

1. **Verses 26–30**—*What are the consequences of this miracle?*

- The three men are released from their “prison.”
- The king no longer finds fault with their refusal to worship the image.
- He appreciates the faithfulness of the three men, including their unwillingness to compromise.
- Recognizing God as the only true God who can save in such a marvelous way, he issues a command against blasphemy. His knowledge of God increases.
- The three men are promoted.

II. Application

- As it was in the past, so it still is today: The Son of God saves us (v. 25). He makes us His children, if we allow Him.
- Because we are saved and belong to God as Daniel’s three friends did, we are faithful (vs. 17, 18). We are obedient in great and small matters. This may not always be easy, but Jesus will help us and will allow us to experience His interventions. Obedience and faithfulness are a sign of love (John 14:15, 21; 15:10).
- Daniel 3 forms the background of Rev 13:11–18. In the last days of world history, this obedience and faithfulness will be needed again. The issue will also be worship: worship of the dragon, the sea beast, or the image of the beast (Rev 13:4, 8, 15) versus worship of God (Rev 14:7). The faithful people of God will be dedicated to Jesus and keep God’s commandments, especially the Ten Commandments (Rev 14:12). We want to be part of them.
- Following Jesus does not exclude suffering and, in some cases, even death (Dan 3:18). We should not have illusions. While Christian faith offers us a new and better quality of life, it is not an insurance against distress and suffering in this world.
- However, there will be final salvation. We are waiting for God’s kingdom to come. There will be the resurrection of the dead and eternal life without suffering and death (Rev 21:3, 4). Daniel also knew about this kingdom of God (Dan 2:44). We are looking forward to it.

Conclusion

There is salvation. There is hope beyond death (see Dan 12:13). Even if the entire world is ruined and destroyed, this is not the end. There is hope beyond the “end.”