

In chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar summons his satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, and magistrates to worship a golden idol. The variety of these official positions may indicate that the Babylonian empire adopted customs and titles from the different lands they conquered. Satraps, for examples, are governors of Persian provinces so they may have come from the region overlapping Persia.

How could Nebuchadnezzar meld all these peoples and cultures into a single nation? One strategy used by many rulers through the ages is to establish a national religion, associating worship of a god with veneration for the political rulers. The Roman emperors went so far as to call themselves gods. We are not told that the image in the plain of Dura resembles Nebuchadnezzar himself but it seems designed to unite his motley subjects under a single religious system. We read of a similar forced worship in Revelation 13, where the false prophet compels all people to worship the beast.

There are three who refuse to join: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (their Babylonian names). These young men hold high positions in the Babylonian government, we are told at the end of chapter 3. We assume they have served their earthly lord well. Perhaps they have even collected the revenue to pay for the statue's construction. But they will not bow before it.

This story holds lessons for the believer today. First, we are to remain subject to the government even when it conducts activities contrary to the word of God. *"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God ... Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed"* (Romans 13:1,7). Remember, the

government under which this was written was a notoriously wicked and idolatrous regime.

We are to resist the government, however, when it mandates *direct* participation in activities forbidden by God. But we must be prepared to accept the consequences as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did. God may be glorified through our deliverance, as they were, or He may be glorified through our testimony in the face of persecution. In either case the goal is His glory.

One obvious question: Why is there no mention of Daniel in this chapter? We can assume he is not prostrate before the idol along with the other worshipers. Perhaps he is absent on an errand for the king or his duties are keeping him in the city of Babylon. At any rate, his absence avoids the necessity of openly defying the king's command. There may be a lesson for us that it's sometimes acceptable to lie low and avoid confrontation.

Notes on 3:8 – 4:3

3:8 Jealousy of the high positions given to Daniel's friends appears to be the motive behind their being reported to the king. The Chaldeans forget that Daniel and his three friends saved their life earlier, as told in chapter 2.

3:10 Among the names for musical instruments are three Greek words. Some claim this as evidence that Daniel was written after the time of Alexander, when Greek culture pervaded the area. But Greece conducted trade with Babylon even in the time of Nebuchadnezzar so Greek words may well have been adopted in Babylon.

All the varied instruments must have formed quite an orchestra. The power of music to influence men's emotions may have helped foster the desired attitude of submission to the king and idol.

3:12 Note that the Chaldeans first accuse the three men of paying no attention to the king, thus arousing his vanity. Men are often angered more at a slight to themselves than to their god.

3:15 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego still enjoy enough of the king's favor that he gives them a second chance to comply. Nebuchadnezzar asks, "Who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" The question is meant to be rhetorical like Pilate's "What is truth?" but the king gets a very specific answer. It is "our God whom we serve."

3:17-18 Verse 18 appears to be hedging on verse 17: The men say that God will deliver them, then say even if otherwise they will not worship the idol. Note that they say God *can* deliver them from the furnace and *will* deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar. Even if they are consumed in the furnace, they know that God will still deliver them from the king's hand by taking them home to Him. Their faith embraces every circumstance.

3:19 The furnace may have been a large kiln for firing bricks. The science-minded will wonder

what temperature scale is used to say the furnace is heated seven times hotter than usual. Perhaps it's packed with seven times the usual load of fuel. Such a blaze, heavy on fuel but short of air, could well explode into a fireball and kill anyone nearby when the furnace door is opened.

3:24-25 These verses, where the faith of the three is vindicated, speak to all those today who are the Lord's. "*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you*" (Isa. 43:2). We know that the Son of God is truly with us, not merely looking on, through any fiery trial.

3:27 The miracle is not only that the men survive the fire but that no trace of it remains upon them. That is how God sees us when we have been cleansed of our sin through the blood of Christ. "*... as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us*" (Psalm 103:12).

3:29 King Nebuchadnezzar is not a proponent of the separation of church and state.

4:1-3 Note the progression of Nebuchadnezzar's understanding of God:

- In 1:20 he sees the effect of godliness in the character and wisdom of Daniel and his friends.
- In 2:47 he marvels at God's ability to reveal mysteries.
- In 4:3 he begins to see God as sovereign and eternal.
- Looking forward to 4:35, Nebuchadnezzar finally acknowledges God's dominion over all creatures and yields to Him.