

PM Daniel 3 Nebuchadnezzar's Decree

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- [0 : 00] As I mentioned this morning, Daniel chapter 3, reading again, it's another sort of slightly lengthy passage, but again, some repetition, but it's worth reading the whole passage.
- Nebuchadnezzar's golden image. This, as we saw, was just after, chronologically, it might not be immediately after his dream, but soon after.
- And it's interesting that it follows on from his dream of that statue that he had. And now it says,
- However, does not fall down on worship, shall be cast into a burning fire of furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the fairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- These men, O king, pay no attention to you. They don't serve your gods or worship the golden image that you set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar, in furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought.
- [3 : 12] So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, It's true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my god or worship the golden image that I have set up.
- Now if you're ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into the burning fiery furnace.
- And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.
- If this be so, our god whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fires. And he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.
- But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- [4 : 22] He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of the army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.
- Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments and were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, a flame of the fire killed those men who took Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished.
- He rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the fire? He answered and said to the king, True, O king, he answered and said, But I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire.

Are they not hurt? And the appearance of the fourth is like the sons of the gods. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace.

[5 : 32] He declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Servants of the Most High God, Come out and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire.

And the satraps and prefects and governors and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men.

The hair of their heads was not sinched, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. So Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own god.

Therefore I make a decree to any people, nation, language, that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb in their houses' laden ruins.

For there is no god who is able to rescue in this way when the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. May God add his blessing to this reading of his inspired word.

[6 : 53] Let us again return to God in prayer. We thank you how appropriate these psalms can be to harmonise with our reading where we read about Nebuchadnezzar relying on his gods.

But we thank you for the psalmist declaration that he would only worship God. And we would remember, Lord, that we should have no other gods before us as well as you have commanded and that we would dedicate our service to you.

Forgive us maybe not for having physical idols, but sometimes we might have other types of idols, things that we pay attention to, maybe giving too much time to them rather than time to yourself.

And some of us have hidden idols. And we pray, Lord, that we would turn from them and serve you rather than these thoughts that sometimes come into our hearts.

We know, Lord, that there's nothing at times that is visible, but we know, Lord, that in our hearts sometimes we create idols for ourselves, whatever they may be, giving more time to material things or things that are on the telly or whatever, rather than time with your word or time that would be better spent.

[8 : 20] And so, Lord, help us to apply these passages in our situation that we'd honour you with our lives. And we thank you, Lord, that you accept of us.

But we know, Lord, we need your forgiveness. And we ask that you would forgive us for at times, well, even reading the word sometimes will let our minds wander and so on.

And we ask that you would accept of us in him. Again, we pray that you would be with us as we study God's word tonight, that you would open it up for us.

And we thank you for the quietness and the stillness of this place, while others we know are in turmoil. And we know, Lord, particularly in the situation you create and how true that will be, and what a dreadful situation that these people are in.

And we pray, Lord, that you protect them from evil and rescue those who are surrounded by problems. We pray, Lord, for those who have fled that country.

[9 : 31] And we pray, Lord, that you'd give them a home. We thank you for some within Scotland that we know have taken in folk from Ukraine. And we pray, Lord, above all, for peace in that land.

We know that this is beyond human ability. But yet, God, you can intervene. As we saw this morning, you're the one that can set up kings and bring them down, as Daniel prayed.

And we pray, Lord, in a way that you would bring down the evil and rise up those who worship you and the innocent. So we bring that problem before you.

We bring our government and wisdom that they need in connecting with Ukraine and the wisdom that they need in these days of high inflation, how to manage that and how to help the poor.

And we pray for wisdom to be given to them to handle the affairs of the nation. We pray for the Queen. I thank you recently for the celebration of her 70 years of reign.

[10 : 40] And we thank you that she confesses her own faith openly and knows that you are her strong, her strong shield and comforter.

We pray that her family likewise would follow with that same faith that they would come to know the Lord for themselves. And remember above all, there is a great King above them all who they too will bow the knee before Him.

And so Lord, we pray that you protect them. So Lord, as we come to you in prayer, we pray for any who are set aside in this congregation who are not so well, be with them and undertake for them and bring them back to wanted health and strength.

And continue to provide supply for this congregation, be with them as specially this weekend. But whether they worship here themselves or whether you bring someone, that it would be a blessing to them.

Be with them as they meet as a session and court soon and that all decisions will be made according to will and purpose and you would provide for a witness still in this place that would be a blessing to the community.

[11 : 55] So Lord, as we pray these things, we ask that you'd continue to be with us. Amen. So as I said, we'll continue singing in the psalm. I think we're at verse 7 now.

16 verse 7. I'll praise the Lord my God whose counsel guides my choice and even in the night my heart recalls instruction's voice. So let's sing the rest of the psalm to God's praise.

And we'd love to hear and hear my mind is an of Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Such was the declaration of the faith of Meshach.

[14 : 56] Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They're around about 580 BC I'm told. And as we saw this morning the people of God are living in exile in Babylon.

And we're just past this dream. And that's why we had to take chapter 2 first. Because as you can see yourselves there's a close connection with the dream of this statue.

That Daniel interpreted the gold, the silver and bronze and iron. What it meant and the stone that came and broke it all.

And I think obviously I think from the beginning of the chapter. This is obviously still, although it's I think a few years later. It's still in the mind of Nebuchadnezzar, this dream.

And in his pride you notice what happens. That he made this statue of gold. You remember how he was the head of gold and now he makes this statue.

[16 : 06] I looked at a footnote later on. And some versions of the scripture it gives us. This height was 90 feet.

And the width was 9 feet. That's how big this thing was. This big statue. It could have been, it was standing on a kind of platform type thing.

But it was quite a huge golden statue. Whether it was gold plated or solid gold, it doesn't matter. It was certainly a very valuable material that it was made of.

And so this is Nebuchadnezzar's pride after being told, you're the head of gold. And it follows on chapter 3, I think, with that in his mind.

I'm the head of gold. Right, I'll build an image of gold. And so that comes from the background of chapter 2. And I think what Nebuchadnezzar was trying to do here was trying to unite his kingdom under a common religion.

[17 : 15] This is what everyone, with no exceptions at all, was meant to do. No matter if Jew or Gentile. And that was the whole point. The Jews would have found it very difficult.

The people of God would have found it very difficult to follow this ruling of the king. That he declared about this statue that he had a dream about.

You saw a great image. And here it was. He tried, I think, in some ways, to create this image and make people fall down to worship it.

And he called all these different authorities, the whole list of them, and the different capacities to come to the dedication of this statue, of this thing that people were going to fall down and worship.

And so at that time, you remember that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they were actually appointed officials over the affairs of the province. If you look back at chapter 2, if you look back at chapter 2, at the end of chapter 2, that was part of the follow-on from Daniel's gift of interpreting the dream that Shadrach, Abednego, and Meshach.

[18 : 40] At the end, they were over the affairs, it says, of the province of Babylon. So these three were heavily involved in the setup of Babylon, involved in the community.

And they were well-known people. They were well-known. And they too were called to worship this coming with all this music.

A lot of music has an effect. The way it's played is a kind of an effect. Any of you who, I'm sure you've not been at gigs, but if you've ever seen a gig, you see how an effect the music can have on people.

And it's that kind of effect that the music kind of has on these people that makes them kind of worship the statue, the sound of all these musical instruments.

And, of course, Nebuchadnezzar in his jealousy and his sin said, you must worship, fall down and worship this statue that I've created.

[19 : 51] And that was his decree. And if you don't, as we read, you'll be put to death. But if you do, you'll be rewarded. So even as he set up the statue, and even as he declared that, it was obvious in his mind that some people weren't going to obey him.

Because he made a kind of clause. If you don't do this, this is what's going to happen. And so there's provision for folk who are going to be, because he knew the Jewish people.

He knew God's people. They had one God. There's that famous verse in Deuteronomy 6.4, the Shema, I think it's called. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And that was called the Shema, because that's a Hebrew word, I think, for hear.

It's a, you know, that was the Jewish background, way back in Deuteronomy, way back in the Ten Commandments, you shall have no images before me. And that's repeated in that well-known verse in Deuteronomy.

[21 : 02] And that, I think, when the king decreed that they were to fall down and worship, his own folk in Babylon would have no problem in this, because they had so many gods, this was just one more, it wouldn't bother them.

I think the king was very aware of this. And I think the first thing that we read, we can take from these first verses there, from verses 1 to 7, is that God's people were put to the test.

And again, this could have happened way back in Deuteronomy. And as God continued to test his people when they left Egypt, and this is what it says in Deuteronomy 8.2, you'll remember the whole way the Lord your God has led you, these 40 years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.

And I think there's something of that verse here, as God's testing his people through this challenge to their faith, testing them to see if they were going to obey God, and God alone, and to have this priority of worshipping him alone, as the only true God.

And that's the same test it puts before us today, testing us that we will be loyal to him, no matter what circumstances we are put in.

[22 : 32] I don't think we'll ever be put in the situation, hopefully, of being put in a fiery furnace. But things are changing, aren't they, in society? There's all kinds of pressures creeping in.

And I think in some ways, it can be a test to us to see what is in our heart. Are we going to remain loyal to God, no matter what others in the society are proclaiming, what they're saying?

And that was the challenge way back in Deuteronomy, and that was the challenge in these first, I think, seven verses here. God testing his people, what were they going to do? What was Shadrach, Meshach, and Benigot going to do with this test?

These high-profile officials, that had just been promoted, and were loyal to the king. So that is the first thing that I see in this chapter.

God's people are put to the test. And the second thing, from verse 8, maybe through to verse 12, roughly, is these God's people, therefore, right today, are called to live in a different lifestyle, to live distinctively.

[23 : 42] And that's what God's call is. That's what we see, in some degree, in the following few verses, that these three, if I get their names in the right order, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were called to live distinctly, from the pressures of Babylon.

Now, we know quite a lot about Babylon, and the kind of society it was in. And here were three Christians. When we call them Christians, you know, people who love, Old Testament believers, who love the Lord, as Deuteronomy says, with all the heart, soul, and strength.

How are they going to live, in such a society as Babylon? And here, they're called to live distinctly, in this environment. How easy it would have been, for these three men, just to say, oh, well, we'll just pretend.

So not to cause any trouble, we're not really going to worship, this idol, but for sake of peace, we'll just kneel down, we won't say any prayers, we'll just do that, outwardly, inwardly, our hearts with God.

That might have been a temptation, wouldn't it? That would get them out of problem. But no, they were not willing, even to outwardly, make that pronouncement, with their bodies.

[25 : 02] These people, in this leadership role, and community, folks' eyes would be upon them. They would be a great witness, these three officials, within the camp, that they stood up, for their faith.

And that was a great witness, to that community, surrounded by, these people, who worshipped idols, surrounded by, their, societal, influences, that they were willing, to stand up, under that pressure, and not conform, and, be willing to worship, this image.

So they were very bold, in their faith. And they knew the consequences, of that, as we read, in that, these famous verses, of 17 and 18. Especially, quite, they were put to death.

And, the king, probably, would be thinking, about these three officials. Well, I've just promoted, these three men. And this is, this is their reaction. This is how they pay me back.

You know, the king had just promoted them, and these three men, were now, as though, defying this king, who'd given them, these positions. That's maybe, something that the king, was thinking.

[26 : 22] So, it gives them, a second opportunity. He, he, he, speaks to them again, to Shadrach, Meshach, and then, he takes them aside, and says, look, one more chance.

You've got one more chance. Either you do this, or you go to the furnace. So, eh, but they declared, this wonderful testimony of faith.

It's, it's as though, you remember, Jesus, that famous, eh, verse, in Matthew 26, 39, where he says, my father, if it be the possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will. Wouldn't that be, maybe something, I thought, these three men were praying, at that time. Let this cup pass from us, if it be your will.

Let's, summarizing, verse 17 and 18, I think that, that's a, a good, New Testament, kind of text, not as I will, but as you will. And that's exactly, the kind of language, that they're, these three men are using, in a similar way, to Christ himself.

[27 : 35] So that, that's, the, the, the thing we see here, em, that, they're called, to live, distinctively. And that's the second thing, yes, God puts us through the tests, that's the first thing we looked at.

But the second thing, that we learn from these, this passage, is that we too, who claim the name of Christ, are to live, distinctively, from, the society around us.

We're called, to stand up for our faith, in the midst of, the, the, the society, that we're living in. And then, this is, verses 16 to 18, roughly, is this, I've called, for me to live as Christ, and to die as gain.

And, that was, again, that, quote, I'm taking, obviously, from, Philippians 1, 21, where, we read Paul, saying, for me to live as Christ, and to die as gain, if I am to live, in the flesh, that means fruitful labour, for me.

Yet, which shall I choose? I can't tell. I'm hard pressed, between the two. My desire is to do part, and be with Christ, for that, is far better.

[28 : 55] But, to remain in the flesh, is more necessary, on your account. And that, again, I think that's a good, verse to turn to, summarise in 17 and 18.

For me to live as Christ, to die as gain. And, that's what they're saying, in these two verses. And, that's their faith. That they're living for Christ.

And, if they had to die, for their faith, well, they would be with Christ, which is far better. They'd be with their God, who they loved. But, if, they stayed, as they did, as God intervened, as we know, then, they would be able to serve God, where they were, which was far better, in as much, that these three, would maintain, a powerful witness, having undergone, that test of faith.

And so, that was, that verse, and, I think Philippians, sums up, for me to live, is Christ, to die, is gain. So, God, would deliver them.

Especially, verse 18. But if not, be it known to you, O King, that we will not serve you, gods, or worship, or worship, the golden image, that you have set up.

[30 : 07] And, they knew, by saying that, that even if God didn't, deliver them, they would still, keep their faith. And, and so, they made that, wonderful declaration, knowing, that God, even if they, were, not, if God didn't intervene, in a special way, and deliver them.

He would intervene, in an even more special way. He would raise them, from the dead, to be with them, into eternal kingdom, as chapter 2, pointed towards.

And that was their faith, that, this world, was not their home. They had a home, that they were going to. Just like Abram, he, he, he reminds us of Abram, who set his, eyes on a home, that was eternal, that were to fix their eyes, upon Jesus, and look full, on his wonderful face, that the things of earth, will go strangely dim, in the light of his glory, and grace.

And so, these, three, had that kind of, it's that testimony, coming through, in the following verses, the hope, of a future kingdom. That's, that was their hope.

If not, we know that, what they're saying is, I know that God, has a, very special deliverance. Even if we die, that won't be the end.

[31 : 31] Because we'll be, caught up, with Christ, in the end. I think there's something of that, here, in their declaration, in these verses. And it reminds us, that, we have a similar faith.

That, if God, does take us, away, that's not the end. We have this great faith, that we'll be with him. And, even, it was interesting, we had a wee prayer, in the session, and, Norman, was inspired, to pray about, about this, in an interesting way.

But, we all have, to count one day. We don't know, when that day is. And, but we know, this, that whatever day it is, God will deliver us, in a very special way.

But, sometimes, he wants to preserve our lives, to serve him longer. And, that's why we're here. He's preserved our lives, to serve him. We're here to serve him. And, he's kept us safe.

We know of many, people that we love, who are much younger, than I am, or, at similar ages. And, they've passed away, recently. Yet, God's kept me.

[32 : 47] So, and, maybe kept some of you. And, that's so that, as Paul declared, it's more necessary, on your account, it's more necessary, that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were kept.

Because, they had such a great witness, to maintain, in that Babylonian society. So, that through them, God's word, would be, seen. After all, these were the three men, who'd entered the, the furnace.

And, as we'll see, and as we read, that, they had this, assurance, that they would be delivered, finally, from death, to life.

And, they had that hope. Romans 12, puts it this way, as we are called, to serve God. That famous, verse, the beginning of Romans 12.

Appeal to you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies, as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed, to this world, but be transformed, by the renewing, of your mind.

[33 : 54] So, that's what, these three were doing. That version, they were presenting, their bodies, as a living sacrifice, literally, as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

But, but Romans says, we are to do that, in a special way. And, we are challenged, by the faith. But, of course, we turn to, the next point, that God does, and we know the story so well, but God does, deliver them, in a very special way.

After, being tested, after being called, to live, distinctly, he had, this faith, for me to live, is Christ, to die is gain.

And now, God does, deliver them, in that very, special way, as Nebuchadnezzar, looks on, in astonishment, at this fiery furnace, and sees, not just three men, that were thrown in, but four, in the midst, of the fire, walking, around, in the fire, it's quite amusing, when you think of it.

And, these people, were walking around, casually, in this fiery furnace. One is like, the son of God, he says, this is Nebuchadnezzar, saying, one is like, the son of God.

[35 : 15] And, we're going to sing, I think, at the end, Psalm 34, and the words of, Psalm says, the angels of the Lord, encamp around, those who fear him, and delivers them.

Now, whether it's an angel, or, whether it was, one of these Christologies, as it's called, a pre-manifestation, of Christ, before, either way, God intervened, with this fourth person, coming along, Nebuchadnezzar, himself, calls it an angel, later on, in the passage.

But, God intervened, by sending, this fourth, angel, or the angel, into the midst, of this fire, and they were kept, of course, from, dying, they were kept, in a very special way, not even a proper smoke smell, was upon them, they weren't singed, and God, was advancing his kingdom, by delivering them, in that very special way, and, the king then says, your descendants, of the most high God, come out, and, he commands them, to come out, you know, they stayed there, until the king said, come out, there they are, walking around the fire, until, it says, you're the servants, of the mighty high God, come out, they were called forth, from certain death, remember how, when Lazarus was dead, come forth, and it's similar here, these people, should have been, dead with this fire, but the king says, come out, and they came out, to astonishment, of everything, and, we read of this, miracle, and, because of this, miracle that happened, that God's intervention, through an angel, or the angel, of God, what happened, was Nebuchadnezzar, made a kind of, confession, because of this miracle, and honoured,

Daniel, and the three friends, in a special way, he kind of, comes to a confession, he never, claims God, for himself, I seem to remember, he just, refers to Daniel, that you're the servants, of the most high God, he fails to, bring himself, to say, he is my God, but, it was a miracle, itself, that made him, make some kind, of profession, of faith, faith, but that faith, we know, in Nebuchadnezzar's life, at that point, faded away, if you go on, to read it, some, folk, as I said, declared, in the end, Nebuchadnezzar, did come to faith, but it wasn't, at this point, his faith, was based on miracles, it wasn't, a faith, based on, the word of God, it wasn't, a faith, based, on, things, that he could, stand on, the rock, but it was a faith, like the miracles, it reminded me, of the miracles, of the 5,000, in John chapter 6, you remember, the miracle, where, he, he, divided the bread up, between the 5,000 men, lots of women, and children, and, there was a great, crowd, following him, and, as you read on, chapter 6, along,

John chapter 6, the long chapter, they were following, God, just because, of the miracle, it wasn't, because, they had faith, and at the end, of that chapter, sadly, when, he challenges them, many, it says, left, because, the miracle, it was just, these things, that made them, follow Christ, it wasn't, a personal conviction, and it was a bit, like that, Nebuchadnezzar, it was just, the miracle, that made them, it wasn't, a passing, conviction, you remember, the parables, it's a bit like, the parables, the sower, the seed, that was sown, which part, of the seed, was sown, that sprung up, that was in the rocks, and, it didn't last, the joy didn't last, because it wasn't, grounded, so, I think, there's something, like that, in Nebuchadnezzar, and, and, our faith, mustn't be based, on superficial things, and, but faith, based, on Christ himself, that he does, take a step of faith, doesn't he, and, and, he says, there's no other God, who's able to rescue, in this way, so, we'll learn, these few things, from this chapter,

[40 : 05] God does test us, his people, to see, if we, we will, honour him, we are called, to live distinctively, in this society, that we're in, and, that's a great challenge, today, isn't it, the way the society, is going, with some of these, crazy laws, that are being introduced, that's not being recorded, but, to my mind, some of the things, that are coming in, and sadly, in certain quarters, recently, in the assemblies, things were, brought in, that should now, have been brought in, to the church, and we, as Christians, are called, to live distinctively, with all these, various voices, and, and the way, things are going, to stand up, for Christ, and to, in that environment, that we're in, just like now, these three were, in that environment, of Babylon, we're in, a society now, that's, just, going, their own way, so, let us, take up, that word, for me, to live, is Christ, to die, is gain, many years ago, we were in the, scripture union, this is going back, and this was, a chorus, we used to sing, quite a lot, and, it's also, been developed, into a hymn, but,

I remember it, as a chorus, the very words, of scripture, I won't sing it to you, but, it's still on my mind, but God, delivered, his people, from certain death, and the good news, is that, when we trust in him, he will deliver us, from certain death, we'll be, we'll have to meet, one day, and, he can rescue us, from death, and that's, the note, we want to leave you with, he is a powerful God, see how powerful he was, to intervene, in these three people's lives, he's the same God, with the same power, that will rise up, the dead, to have faith in Christ, and to take them up, to be with Christ, is the same God, and that's our faith, tonight, so may God bless, these two thoughts, to us, but, and it that Dualis, it is the same God, and that's us, just to have to reach for today, for now, it's not about to say, but to see this, it's the same God, the light is healing, in the right, you know, that that's you, you know, and that's what I also, before am I as part-■■■■, and that's what I am.

I would say I do that, you know, and that's all about this, you know, whatever Will do, or anything, what sometimes, and that's what I have said,