

**Reformation Fellowship Notes • May 17, 2020**  
**Teacher: David Crabtree**  
**Handout #5**  
**Daniel 3**

**I. Introduction**

A. Questions from last week:

1. Why was Daniel threatened with punishment along with the other wise men?
  - a) Daniel and his friends were being trained to enter the profession of “wise men” or “Chaldeans.”
  - b) Nebuchadnezzar is very emotional; he has a bad temper.
    - (1) Extreme punishments
      - (a) Punishments for whole groups instead of just the violators
2. Can we put names to the empires represented by the different metals in the statue?
  - a) I don’t think we are encouraged to do so.
    - (1) Only the first and the last empires are given any distinctive qualities.
      - (a) The first is identified as the Babylonian empire.
        - (i) It is the starting point.
        - (ii) It helps identify what kind of thing the metals represent (empires).
      - (b) The last is described with distinctive qualities because it is the telos.
    - (2) It is presenting the trajectory.
      - (a) It describes where all empires are headed.

B. Where are we?

1. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream.
  - a) Daniel told him the dream and interpreted it.
2. What Nebuchadnezzar learned:
  - a) He was the head of gold (best empire).
  - b) Empire will be reduced to dust blowing in the wind.
    - (1) Empire is made vulnerable due to lack of cohesion.
      - (a) Lack of unity is the Achilles heel of Empire.
3. I think Nebuchadnezzar thought about this vision he received from a god and took it seriously.

C. When did Chapter 3 happen?

1. There is no indication of a date.
2. But it is not so long after the dream that he is no longer thinking about it.
  - a) A guess: about 603-600 BC.

D. My plan of attack:

1. I will work through half of the chapter, pointing out some features of the text.
2. Then I will try to make sense of what is going on with the statue.
3. Then we will work through the last half of the chapter.

**II. Daniel 3:1-3**

*King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. <sup>3</sup> So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.*

- A. Nebuchadnezzar builds a huge statue—probably inspired by the image in his dream.
  - 1. 90 feet tall; 6 feet wide
    - a) This is pillar like; if it is a statue of a person, it is stylized.
    - b) Monumental, tall
  - 2. All out of gold
    - a) This does not have less precious metals in it at all.
  - 3. Placed on the plain of Dura
    - a) Visible from a long way away
- B. Dedication ceremony held for the statue
  - 1. Long list of government administrators given
    - a) The long list impresses on the reader that all the government officials were there.
      - (1) List is repeated.
    - b) Complete buy-in by the government bureaucracy was required.
      - (1) They were to serve as a model of behavior for everyone else.

**III. Daniel 3:4-7**

*Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: <sup>5</sup>As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."*

<sup>7</sup> *Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*

- A. A herald makes an announcement on behalf of the King.
  - 1. Required of all the people of the empire
    - a) The whole empire was required to comply.
      - (1) Peoples
      - (2) Nations
      - (3) Men of every language
  - 2. When music was played
    - a) These instruments represent instruments from different cultural groups.
      - (1) All but one appears to be either Greek or Anatolian (from Turkey).
      - (2) This is a multi-ethnic band.

3. People from all over the empire were to bow down and worship the statue.
  4. Anyone who fails to do this will be burned alive.
- B. Notice the repetitions:
1. List of bureaucrats is repeated.
  2. List of people is repeated.
  3. List of instruments is repeated.

#### IV. Daniel 3:8-12

*At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. <sup>2</sup> They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, <sup>11</sup> and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. <sup>12</sup> But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."*

- A. Some of the Chaldeans used this occasion to bring a charge against the Jews.
1. These Jews did not worship the statue.
    - a) This is presented as an act of insubordination—
      - (1) A challenge to the authority of Nebuchadnezzar.
  2. These astrologers are probably using this as an opportunity to eliminate these rivals for power.
    - a) Jealousy
    - b) Anti-semitism
  3. *"O king, live forever!"*
    - a) Apparently, this is a standard greeting.
    - b) But in this case, it is flattery.
    - c) This is also a statement encouraging Nebuchadnezzar to continue down the path that he is following.
  4. The penalty for not doing this is to be burned in a fiery furnace.
    - a) Not just a wrist slap
    - b) Daniel and his friends were the ones who saved the wise men earlier.
  5. *"who pay no attention to you"*
    - a) This is not true.
      - (1) The astrologers want Nebuchadnezzar to get angry,
        - (a) So they make it personal.
      - (2) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not trying to undermine Nebuchadnezzar's authority; they are conscientious objectors.
        - (a) Is there room in Babylon for conscientious objectors?

**V. Daniel 3:13-15**

*Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"*

- A. Nebuchadnezzar was very angry.
  - 1. He is a hot head.
  - 2. He brought the three before him and gave them another chance to bow down to the image.
    - a) If they do not, they will be thrown into a furnace.
      - (1) "What god can deliver you from our hands?"
  - 3. From what follows, I suspect that he does not hate the three.
    - a) He hopes they will comply.
  - 4. But he can't allow any dissent.

**VI. Daniel 3:16-18**

*Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

- A. The three did not argue with Nebuchadnezzar.
  - 1. They did not need to defend themselves before Nebuchadnezzar in this matter.
    - a) This leaves open the possibility that they could need to defend themselves before Nebuchadnezzar in other circumstances.
      - (1) But in this case, they stand before God, and God alone, as judge.
    - b) They are confident that God will hold them blameless in this matter.
      - (1) And God outranks Nebuchadnezzar.
  - 2. God is able and might have reason to spare them their fate.
    - a) But even if he doesn't, we won't serve your gods or worship the image.

"They do not doubt the power of their god to deliver them from the king's furnace, but they have no right to presume that he will do so." (Baldwin, p. 116)

**VII. What is going on here?**

- A. Why did Nebuchadnezzar set up this image?
  - 1. Many commentators say “arrogance.”
    - a) Many assume that it is a statue of Nebuchadnezzar.
    - b) There is undoubtedly arrogance involved.
- B. I think it was Nebuchadnezzar’s response to the vision he received in chapter 2.
  - 1. The main reasons why I think this:
    - a) Chapter 3 begins with “Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold.”
      - (1) This is right on the heels of talking about the vision.
    - b) His image is all gold.
      - (1) His image does not get less precious as you move down the statue.
    - c) The emphasis on multinational buy-in matches the fact that in the vision, lack of cohesion was the weak spot of Empire.
- C. If this is true, what is Nebuchadnezzar thinking?
  - 1. The vision he received in chapter 2 was from God.
    - a) It is important.
    - b) It is reliable.
  - 2. It revealed to him the vulnerability of Empire:
    - a) Lack of cohesion.
  - 3. Nebuchadnezzar wants to keep that from happening.
    - a) Two possible explanations:
      - (1) He thought the vision was a warning—encouragement to fix this problem.
      - (2) He thought he could cheat fate.
        - (a) My hunch is that this is the case.
  - 4. The image is two things:
    - a) An image of the unified Empire;
    - b) The means of unification.
  - 5. Nebuchadnezzar wants to unify his empire by requiring everyone to worship an image of the unified effort (the empire) they have created.
    - a) He wants to make his empire invulnerable and eternal.
  - 6. I suspect that the three understood what Nebuchadnezzar was doing.
    - a) Nebuchadnezzar did not understand what was at the heart of the vision.
      - (1) Empire is an act in futility.
      - (2) It is also an act of defiance against God.
    - b) They would have no part of it.

**VIII. Daniel 3:19-23**

*Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.*

- A. This made Nebuchadnezzar even more angry.
  - 1. His facial features changed.
    - a) This chapter has more detail of Nebuchadnezzar's body language to tell the story.
  - 2. He is mad because the three were intransigent.
    - a) Unity requires 100% control.
    - b) He probably saw it as personal betrayal.
  - 3. Why is he so mad?
    - a) Is this an indication of his insecurity?
- B. He had the oven made especially hot.
  - 1. He appointed brave men to throw them into the furnace.
  - 2. They tied up the three.
  - 3. The brave men died while throwing the three into the furnace.
    - a) Nebuchadnezzar had no regard for the lives of his servants.

**IX. Daniel 3:24-27**

*Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"*

*They replied, "Certainly, O king."*

<sup>25</sup> *He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

<sup>26</sup> *Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"*

*So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, <sup>27</sup> and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.*

- A. As he watched, Nebuchadnezzar was astounded.
  - 1. Nebuchadnezzar leaps to his feet.
    - a) This signals a radical change in the attitude of Nebuchadnezzar.
  - 2. He asks his officials for verification of what had happened.

- a) Were there not three people?
- b) Were they not bound?
- 3. There are now four walking around unbound.
  - a) One looks like a *son of the gods*.
- 4. He called them out of the furnace.
  - a) He refers to them as servants of the Most High God.
  - b) They came out (the three).
  - c) They were completely untouched by the fire.
    - (1) Not even the smell of smoke
    - (2) Hair not singed
  - d) There were many witnesses along with Nebuchadnezzar.

### X. Daniel 3:28-30

*Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."*

<sup>30</sup> *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

- A. Nebuchadnezzar is completely changed.
  - 1. He blessed the God of the three—
    - a) The God who protected the three;
    - b) The God who sent his angel.
  - 2. He praises the three for their steadfast commitment to God.
    - a) They trusted God.
    - b) They risked their lives.
    - c) They didn't back down.
  - 3. Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree.
    - a) Anyone who disses YHWH will be torn limb from limb and their house destroyed
      - (1) The default punishment
    - b) Because only YHWH can save this way
      - (1) God is a saving God.
    - c) This again falls short of a total recognition of who God is.
- B. Nebuchadnezzar caused the three to prosper.

### XI. Conclusion

- A. This story shows a huge reversal of fortunes.
  - 1. Nebuchadnezzar goes from cruel tyrant to humbled ruler.
  - 2. Chaldeans go from respected supporters of the realm to fools.

3. The three go from criminals subjected to a cruel punishment to honored, loyal functionaries.
  4. Along the way, it gives us some insights into Empire.
- B. Empire results in the idolization of the collective.
1. I am assuming that Babylon is just the seventh century manifestation of the spirit of Babel in Genesis 11.
    - a) Harnessing the resources of everyone toward a common goal
      - (1) Unity of effort and purpose is absolutely critical to success.
      - (2) Security and prosperity of all depends on the cooperation of all
    - b) Everyone is encouraged to look at the collective as the main source of safety and prosperity.
      - (1) When push comes to shove, where does one turn for security?
        - (a) We all have many sources of safety.
          - (i) Family, house, insurance company, etc.
          - (ii) But whenever these conflict, which one do I trust most?
          - (iii) The source of safety that always wins in one's thinking is one's "Rock."
    - c) Empire insists on being the unrivaled "Rock" for every subject.
      - (1) Only then can Empire be at maximum power.
        - (a) And Empire can only provide maximum security when it is at maximum power.
      - (2) Dissent is viewed as blasphemy.
        - (a) Empire insists on true believers.
          - (i) This is why the actions of the three were so problematic and had to be severely punished.
- C. In Empire, punishment ceases to be proportionate.
1. In any healthy judicial system, penalties are proportionate to the violation.
    - a) More serious violations are given more serious punishment.
    - b) One can risk doing the crime if one is willing "to do the time."
  2. As complete obedience becomes more important, punishment evolves into terror.
    - a) Harsh penalties instill fear of authorities.
      - (1) Fear of authorities becomes an important tool of control.
      - (2) When fear of authorities becomes the goal, proportionality becomes less important.
      - (3) Example: Roman crucifixion
  3. Nebuchadnezzar uses punishment as terror.
    - a) That's why the punishments are so extreme.
- D. There is a symbiotic relationship between Empire and "snitches."
1. What do I mean by "snitch?"
    - a) Someone who reports a violation of the law for personal benefit
      - (1) Jealousy, revenge, hatred, etc.
      - (2) Not love of goodness



2. Very common historical phenomenon
    - a) Whenever people sense that those who are in power want to use terror to control behavior, “snitches” arise.
    - b) “Snitches” sense that the authorities are more interested in **examples** than in justice.
      - (1) People who are seen as dissenters.
      - (2) Authorities are likely to harshly punish dissenters in order to instill fear.
        - (a) Authorities are unlikely to investigate thoroughly and fairly.
    - c) Both the authorities and the “snitches” get what they want.
  3. Empire unleashes the worst in people.
- E. The story is primarily about Nebuchadnezzar.
1. I used to think this chapter was about the three.
    - a) They are important.
    - b) They are exemplary.
  2. But Nebuchadnezzar is the primary actor.
    - a) He is the one we are supposed to watch.
  3. Goldingay refers to this as a “conversion story.”

“In effect, as a result of the act of God, the chapter ends up as a conversion story. The three men do not emerge as individuals in the story, and they themselves give us no account of their experience. The one who gives the account is Nebuchadnezzar; the story is about him. The chapter begins with Nebuchadnezzar as something like a blasphemer and ends up with him as someone who is blessing God—even if it will turn out that he has been only “half-converted.” (Goldingay, p. 228)

- a) This is the second time Nebuchadnezzar sees the reality of who YHWH is.
  - (1) But as we will see next week, he has been only “half-converted.”
- b) God will give him a third chance next week.