

Dan 3:1-18

Today we start the study of Dan 3 which describes Neb's golden image. Before we start it is instructive to remember a few things. In Gen 1:26 God says man was created in His image. That is, we were made so as others could see God in our lives. Not that we are God, but that in an incomplete way, we reflect His communicable attributes, so that we display God to others. In Heb 4:12 and 1 Thess 5:23, scripture makes clear we consist of three components: our physical bodies, our soul (our mind, will, and emotions), and our spirit (that part of us which responds to God). Each is to reflect the God who made us.

In Gen 2:17 God commanded Adam and Eve to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for if they did, they would surely die. We know from Gen 3, that they violated this command. And note this violation was really an act of rebellion as they willingly changed sides in the spiritual battle between God and Satan. Because of this their bodies began to die physically, but most importantly, the spirit -that part of their being that responded and was sensitive to God- perished and died as the relationship they had enjoyed with God was now severed. Scripture goes on to tell us that Adam and Eve's nature changed. This meant the inclination, bent, or propensity of their hearts was now to act in their own self-interest, which led them to commit acts which were contrary to God's will. And as the genetic head of humanity, this fallen nature was, and is passed to all of Adam and Eve's progeny (Rm 5:19, Eph 2:3, Gal 5:19). They became depraved, degenerate, and incapable of living a life pleasing to God and this is as true of us as it was of them. This means our will (Rm 1:28), our conscience (1 Tim 4:2), our intellect (2 Cor 4:2, Rm 1:28) -in other words our soul, and our heart (Eph 4:18), is corrupt and blinded. This is why Eph 2:1 states before we came to faith, we were *dead in our trespasses and sins*. We stood condemned with no spiritual life, and under the curse of physical death.

But the miracle is God still loved us, as Romans 5:6-11 notes:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷ Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. ¹⁰ For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. ¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

God took the punishment we deserved, placed it on Christ, and judged Him for our sin. He became our substitute. We did not deserve it, merit it, or otherwise ask for it. He did it out of

love and Grace. And now he offers this gift to us through faith. As a result of receiving this gift, God gives us new spiritual life so we can be in relationship with him once again AND the promise of new physical life—that after we die in these temporal bodies, God will give us a new resurrection body, fit to live with him for eternity.

Now a question. How do people hear this news? Romans gives us an answer. First, God has given us the beauty of creation and our own conscience as a witness to himself. As Romans 1:19-20 says:

They know the truth about God because he has made it obvious to them. ²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

And Romans 2:14-15:

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)

So, God gives us testimony to Himself. We see nature. We have a conscience that bears witness to a standard of right and wrong. We ask ourselves, where does beauty and a standard of right and wrong come from? God begins to stir in our hearts, and through His Spirit begins to convict us of our sinfulness.

Then second, and here is a mysterious part: God then reveals the gospel to us as per Romans 10:14-15:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

God provides his Word to those He wants saved and we respond in faith. I will save the discussion on Election for another day.

But here is another question that helps set the tone for Daniel 3. What happens when one rejects this revelation? In other words when you have knowledge of God, but reject God’s call to you? The answer is in our scripture reading from this morning in Romans 1:21-24:

Yes, they knew God, but they would not worship him as God or even give him thanks. And they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and

confused. ²² Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. ²³ And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. ²⁵ They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen.

God made us to worship Him. The desire to worship is in our DNA, but because we are fallen and sinful, and when we reject truth and God's revelation, we will inevitably construct some sort of idol for ourselves. And our idols will always in some way rationalize and justify our sin. In other words, our idol (s) will begin to look like us and the expression of our sinful nature.

Today our idols, at least in the West, are not usually images of animals, birds, or reptiles, but we have idols. For some of you it may be financial security, a person, a project, an aspiration, a sports team, or pride, but whatever it is, the focus and energy you direct to it allows your sin nature to express itself through it. This is why Romans 1:26 says, *God abandoned them to their shameful desires.*

This is why God is so concerned about idolatry: he does not want the worship that was built into each one of us, to be diverted away from himself. Scripture says God is a jealous God. Jealousy is only present when there are three parties. One is left out because the attention intended for one is diverted to another.

These are the first two commandments of Ex 20:2-6:

"You shall have no other gods before^[a] me.

⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

This is the backdrop of Dan 3. We have the collision between a man who rejects God's revelation and therefore constructs an idol for himself, and three men who want to remain true to the God they love, and therefore reject its worship.

The chapter can be divided as follows:

- a. The decree of worship, vs 1-7.
- b. The accusation, vs 8-12.
- c. The testimony, vs 13-18.
- d. The casting into the furnace, vs 19-23.

- e. Their deliverance, vs 24-27.
- f. Neb's response, vs 28-30.

The decree of Worship, vs 1-7.

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,^[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." ⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshipped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Vs 1, King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,^[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Dan 3 opens with a description of Neb making a statue on the plain of Dura. This chapter follows chapter 2 in which it was revealed to Neb that he was the head of gold of the statue in his dream, thus God had granted him complete sovereignty over the known world. In chapter 3 Neb takes this knowledge and proceeds to construct an image.

There are some theories as to why he did this:

- a. The first is that he saw himself as a god and wanted to be worshipped.
- b. The second is that Neb saw himself not as a god but rather as the greatest man. He knew that he was the most powerful man in the known world and that Babylon, his kingdom, was the most powerful nation on earth. And so, Neb sought to exalt himself and his kingdom.
- c. Third, there was also a political reason to make the statue. Having so many foreign peoples within the kingdom, the making of one singular god in the form of an idol or statue, would serve as a uniting object that all could rally round to show their obedience to the Babylonian state.

Regardless of which theory one chooses, the point is Neb was rather full of himself and so seeks to make sure everyone knows it. In this light, Neb is no different than many who reach a certain point within society (whether they are a politician, an actor, an actress, a CEO, or in any position of leadership). The tendency is to see yourself in terms of what I call the three E's:

- a. exempt, from all the rules that apply to everyone else:
- b. entitled, you deserve all that you have and more:
- c. exalted, you deserve the respect, adulation, and admiration of everyone around you.

The verse notes Neb *made an image*. We are not sure when it was made. Some have speculated it followed the destruction of Jerusalem in 586, as setting up an image (whether an idol or Neb) would show Neb was stronger than Israel's God. Some claim it was made shortly after Daniel revealed Neb's dream. We are not sure when it was constructed.

The verse also does not tell us what the image signified. Was it an image of Neb or the image he saw in his dream? We are not told.

We do know it was an image made *of gold*. The question is why? Here we can surmise Neb was trying to imitate his role in the dream. He was the head of gold, so any image of the dream should reflect who Neb was. The other question is whether it was made of solid gold or was simply overlaid with it. Most commentators suspect the latter as gold is not structurally strong and it would require tons of it to construct such a large statue. More than likely, it followed the pattern of Is 40:19, *As for an idol, a metalworker casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it*. The verse also does not tell us what the image was. Was it a likeness of Neb, or was it the image of his dream?

The verse notes the image was *sixty cubits high and six cubits wide*. A cubit was the length of your forearm and is 18 inches, hence the statue was 90 ft tall and 9 ft wide. Here is an interesting side thought. Neb made an image of two sixes. In Rev 13:14-15 we see another statue constructed with the number 666.

We also note the image was set on the *plain of Dura*. According to Rabbinic tradition, the plain of Dura is another word for the plain of Shinar where the tower of Babel was built (Gen 11:1). We have no hard Biblical evidence of this, but it is an interesting speculation.

Vs 2: 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.

In verse 2, Neb summons various levels of administrators within the provinces of his Kingdom to come to the dedication ceremony he plans for the stature. Note these men were listed by administrative importance.

- a. Satraps, this was a provincial head. Note in Dan 2:48, Daniel was appointed satrap over Babylon.

- b. Prefects, this is a term meaning a head over a group of people within a province, such as a military chief or a head of all the wise men. Dan held this position over the wise men in Babylon as well, Dan 2:48).
- c. Governors, these men ruled provincial “counties.”
- d. Advisors, some translations have “judges.” These were the chief legal administrators.
- e. Treasurers, the finance, and tax people.
- f. Judges, this term also is translated “counselor” and means a lesser judicial official.
- g. Magistrates, these are lesser administrators.
- h. Other provincial officials. This is a catch-all term for others who helped run the provinces.

Note they were anybody and everyone of any social significance. They were careerists. All were to come to the dedication ceremony Neb had planned.

Vs 3: 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.

In verse 3 all these administrators from the provinces of Babylon are again listed. The writer (Daniel) is emphasizing the “go along with the crowd” aspect to this. They all arrive at the Plain of Dura to attend the dedication ceremony Neb has planned. Note, they all stand before the statue; there is no mention of worship. We know from Dan 2:48, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, had all been appointed as administrators in the province of Babylon, and so would have attended this ceremony. It would be like attending a dedication ceremony for a statue of George Washington. What is interesting is Daniel plays no part in this chapter. He is never mentioned. The obvious question is why? The answer is we are not sure. The consensus is Daniel was out of town on royal business, but it remains one of those “deep and hidden” things Daniel mentions in 2:22.

Vs 4: Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do:

In verse 4, we are introduced to Neb’s plans for the ceremony. A herald announces a commandment.

Vs 5: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

Now we see Neb’s intent. A musical band will play, and at the start of the sound everyone must bow down and worship the statue. It is important to understand what is transpiring here. In the ancient world, the state and its religion were one and the same. In other words, the gods of a particular nation were intertwined and indistinguishable from the state apparatus of

government and administration. If another conquered your nation, you would be compelled to submit to the conquering nation's gods as it was understood that the conquering nation's gods were stronger than yours (because you were conquered). An allegiance to the new god signified your allegiance to the conquering state and vice versa. This practice would not conflict with your personal polytheistic religious outlook: it would just add on one more god (or gods) you need to acknowledge now that you are a conquered people. By asking all his subjects to worship this new image, Neb was not asking them to reject their gods, he was simply demanding their loyalty to Babylon as represented by this new deity and to acknowledge this new deity was stronger than theirs. As mentioned, Neb's other goal may have been to unite his disparate peoples with the worship of this one image. To reject this worship was to reject the authority of the god and the state over you.

Vs 6: Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

Verse six notes the penalty for failure to accept the authority of the new god and hence Babylon's authority over you. The word for *blazing furnace*, suggests it was for smelting. Smelting furnaces in the ancient world came in two forms: one vertical (allowing for material to be poured in the top with refined material coming out the bottom), the other was horizontal, or tunnel shaped. In either event, they were hot as they were used to separate metal from ore. From the text it is noteworthy that those who refused this command would be *immediately* thrown into the furnace. The assumption was Neb had a furnace near the statue for its construction and those who violated the command were taken to where it was and tossed into it.

Vs 7: Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshipped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Verse 7 tells us what happened next. The band played and everyone bowed down.

The Accusation, verses 8-12.

At this time some astrologers^[b] came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down, and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² 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, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

Vs 8: At this time some astrologers^[b] came forward and denounced the Jews.

One can now imagine that at the sound of the band, everyone bowed down save for three young Jewish men. They refused to bow for they knew their God was the only God and they would not bow to another, so they were the only ones standing when the command was given. They stood out. The word “astrologer” is also translated as “Chaldean” and implies that the ones who brought the accusation were ethnic Babylonians. Note it was not all the Chaldeans, but just some. Also note all the wise men: the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and astrologers, owed their lives to Daniel and these Jewish men. We know from 2:48, H,M,A, (or SMA) had all been appointed administrators in the province of Babylon and evidently had been elevated over many of their more experienced colleagues. So, this act of non-allegiance became a trigger for these evil men who were both jealous and antisemitic, to bring an accusation before the King.

Vs 9-11: They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down, and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

In these verses the accusers remind Neb of his proclamation and command.

Vs 12: 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, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

In verse 12 we hear the accusation. Note, in a way, it is an accusation against Neb as he appointed these three Jewish men to these offices. Note the accusation has three components:

- a. *They pay no attention to you.* Some translations have “no regard.” Which implies these men do not respect you.
- b. *They neither serve your gods.* This information was not new to the King for he knew they worshiped their God.
- c. *Nor worship the image of gold you have set up.* This was a clear act of disobedience to Neb’s command.

The Testimony, verses 13-18.

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ 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? ¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, 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?" ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^[c] from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Vs 13: *Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king.*

It is clear Neb viewed their refusal as a personal affront, so he responds with rage. Neb was impetuous as noted in 2:5 and 2:12. Here he goes off again, and summons SMA.

Vs 14: *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?"*

Neb personally questions the three men and repeats the charge against them.

Vs 15: *Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, 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?"*

Neb surprisingly repeats the command and gives SMA another chance to obey. He then reiterates the consequences for not obeying. Then at the end of verse 15 he adds this phrase, *then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?* This is quite a different tone than is found in 2:47; *surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries*. His question is more understandable if we assume the image was made after the fall and destruction of Jerusalem as Neb may have been emboldened to proclaim himself greater than the god of the Israelites since he conquered them.

Vs 16: *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.*

In verse 16, SMA decide not to defend themselves. There were no excuses: we did not bow down because we were not going to worship your hand made gods.

Vs 17: *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^[c] from Your Majesty's hand*

Note SMA had complete confidence in God's ability to save them if it were to be God's will.

Vs 18: *But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

But verse 18 tells us SMA understood it may not be God's will to save them. They had the same attitude as Job 13:15, *though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him*. SMA were not going to compromise their relationship. Regardless of Neb's actions they were going to remain faithful.