

# **Dr. Wendy L. Widder, Daniel, Session 6, Daniel 3, God's Superior Power and His Servant's Faithfulness**

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This is Dr. Wendy Whitter in her teaching on the book of Daniel. This is session 6, Daniel 3, God's Superior Power and His Servant's Faithfulness.

In this lecture we're going to be looking at Daniel 3, which is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

Probably one of the most popular and famous stories from the book of Daniel. In this chapter, if I were to summarize what it's about, I would say it's about God's superior power and his servants' faithfulness. So, the God of Israel is going to demonstrate how his power to deliver especially is greater than that of King Nebuchadnezzar, is greater than that of the Babylonian gods, and the faithfulness of his servants is commendable and even admired by the foreign king by the end of the chapter.

First of all, let's get our bearings where we are in the narrative chapters of Daniel. So we have his chiasm, chapter 2 is the statue dream, which is concerned with four earthly kingdoms and a fifth eternal kingdom. Chapter 3, where we're at right now, is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace.

So, we have three faithful Jews who are going to be threatened with death on account of their faithfulness. Chapter 4 is Nebuchadnezzar's second dream, in which he dreams about a tree, a great tree, and then he is judged by God. That's the meaning of the dream, because of his pride, God judges him.

Chapter 5 will be the story of Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall. And just like chapter 4, it's God's judgment on a human king for their pride, but with significant differences. Chapter 6 is the story of Daniel in the lion's den.

A story, again, of a faithful Jew who faces death because of his faithfulness to God. And then chapter 7, Daniel is going to have a vision of his own, in which he sees four mutant beasts rising out of a raging sea. It's going to turn out to be about four earthly kingdoms and the fifth eternal kingdom of God.

So, in this chiastic structure, we are right here. So, we're looking at a story that, a little bit later, we're going to look at its counterpart. Both stories are about God's faithful people who face death because of their faithfulness to God, and God miraculously delivers them out of it, proving himself to be more powerful than the gods of the foreign country.

So that's where it fits in the chiasm. This chapter is also one of the court stories. So, it's about, at its most basic level, foreign captives who are serving in the court of a king and who actually prove themselves to be superior to the king's regular staff.

Although that's the least of this chapter's concerns. This chapter is not concerned necessarily to elevate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as some kind of model of faithfulness, although they certainly are. Its primary reason is to showcase the superiority of their God.

So I'm going to read this story because this one really has to be heard. It has so much repetition that halfway through it, the audience should almost be saying it along with me. There's so much that you can just repeat.

I'm going to be reading the ESV again, but I'm going to make a couple of adaptations, inserting my own preferred translation that's a little more wooden or faithful to the original Aramaic, and it kind of brings out the repetition a little bit better, I think, than the ESV does.

So, Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was 60 cubits, and its breadth 6 cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then, Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king set up. Then, the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up, and the herald proudly, sorry, proclaimed aloud, you are commanded, O people's nations and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the image of gold that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the furnace of blazing fire. Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the people's nations and languages fell down and worshipped the image of gold that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

They declared to Nebuchadnezzar the king, O king, live forever, you, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music shall fall down and worship the image of gold. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a furnace of blazing

fire. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

These men, O king, pay no attention to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar, in furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought.

So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold that I have set up? Now, if you are 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. If you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into the furnace of blazing fire.

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 furnace of blazing fire, 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 image of gold that you have set up.

Then, Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire.

Then, these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the furnace of blazing fire.

Then, Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the fire? They 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, and they are not hurt, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

Then, Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire. He declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the most high god, come out, come here. Then, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire.

And the satraps, the prefects, the 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 singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had even come upon them. 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, any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Alright, so that is the story. Lots of repetition. And some of that repetition is just entertaining. I think some of it might also be intended to be a little bit mocking.

So, we have Nebuchadnezzar, the king, and the image of gold that he set up. It's repeated four, five, six, maybe even nine times. This focuses on the image that the king set up.

The key theme behind all this is that this chapter is about idolatry and how are these captive Jews going to respond when they face idolatry when they face the pressure to worship a god other than their own. Alright, so let's look at the first seven verses a little more closely. Nebuchadnezzar really makes his first display of his own power here.

So, remember, this chapter is about God's superior power. But in order for God to have superior power, we need to see the king he's being superior over. So, Nebuchadnezzar makes a couple shows of power in this chapter.

In the first seven verses, what does he do? Well, he makes this image of gold. By the way, that doesn't give us a time frame. We don't have a date formula in this chapter.

It just jumps right in. Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold. This follows chapter two, obviously.

Chapter two had a date formula, you might remember, and that was in the second year of Nebuchadnezzar. For whatever reason, chapter three doesn't give us one. It's possible that we're supposed to bring that idea of that statue with us into chapter three.

It doesn't tell us why Nebuchadnezzar built this statue; he just made this huge image of gold. In chapter two, he dreamed about an image that had a gold head, and he

was the head of gold. Now, I don't know that the narrator believes, or that we are to believe, that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a statue.

Therefore, he made a statue, even better than the one he dreamed about. The narrator doesn't say that, but he does put these two stories right up against each other. At the very least, you're coming out of a story in which you have this powerful king, and here he is showing his power.

He's flexing his muscles, almost. He's making a statue that's even bigger than the one we just saw or even more grand than the one we just saw. That one was just a gold head.

He's got a statue that's entirely of gold. The statue is described in what might be exaggerated language. We're not sure, but if you did the measurements, I don't expect that you know cubits.

I don't know cubits either. The text says it's 60 cubits by 6 cubits. What that comes out is this statue is 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide.

That is really out of proportion for the statue of a human figure. It might mean that it's supposed to be kind of grotesque in your mind, that this is really out of proportion. Nebuchadnezzar builds this as a splendid display of his power, but really? Maybe not.

Another possibility is that it's a smaller statue, a top, an obelisk, or like a totem pole. We do have some evidence of things like this, much better than that, in the ancient Near East. We don't really know.

The point in the chapter is that he's made this statue, and he thinks it's pretty great, and everybody in the nation is supposed to come and bow down before it. We don't know if it was actually a representation of Nebuchadnezzar, either. It doesn't tell us.

It could have been a representation of one of his gods. It could have been of him. We don't know.

What matters is that it represents something else these Jews are going to be called to worship and that in itself is going to be idolatry. Let's see. So, we have these lists of officials that appear several times, and we could parse them out and talk about what each one of these groups of officials was responsible for.

I think the point of the text is that everybody who was anybody was there. Nebuchadnezzar summoned all the bigwigs, all the powers of the day, and they were to come and follow his command to bow before this statue. You sort of get this idea of this grand occasion.

There are all these officials. There are all these instruments. This repetition builds up this grandiose nature of this dedication event.

So, in this first chapter, we've got the king who sets up this magnificent, or so he thinks, statue. He makes a display of his power, and you get this idea from what the king says and what the people do that the king speaks, and everybody answers, everybody responds. Nebuchadnezzar builds it, calls the people, and all those people come.

Nebuchadnezzar says bow down, and all those people bow down. This is an automatic response to what the king says. So, he has the power to control all of these people.

Then we get to verses 8 through 12, the second section. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward. This is where they maliciously accused the Jews.

I won't read it all again. I already read it. But they come forward, and they accuse the Jews.

It's interesting that it tells us they were Jews, and they actually tell the king that there are certain Jews, not just certain Jews, but ones that you, O king, appointed. There are probably some overtones of ethnic prejudice here, and they've been promoted over these officials, so they are out to get these guys. It's also interesting to notice that they didn't lay a trap.

When we get to Daniel 6, we'll have his colleagues laying a trap, like devising something that Daniel can't help but disobey. In this chapter, they're not quite that malicious. They're really opportunists.

They're standing there watching this dedication ceremony. Everybody falls except those three, although it kind of suggests that maybe the Chaldeans didn't bow either. I'm not sure what we are to think of that.

How did they know that those three men remained standing? We have all kinds of questions when we read biblical narratives. The author is often not interested in answering our questions, but it's good to think about them. For whatever reason, they don't like these men, probably in part because they're Jews, because they've been promoted over them.

Even though they're malicious, the text tells us they're malicious. Their accusation, in part, is true. They are correct that these three men did not bow down, and the king's edict was to bow down or be killed. They're correct.

The three men do, according to the law, deserve death. Even though they're malicious, they're still, at this point, speaking mostly the truth. The refusal to bow down by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have been seen as an act of treason and insubordination.

It follows that Nebuchadnezzar would issue a death sentence for that sort of behavior. In the third section, in verses 13 through 18, we have this confrontation between Nebuchadnezzar, the King, and these three servants, these three Jews who have not bowed down. This is going to be the heart of the chapter.

This is where Nebuchadnezzar is going to blow up, and he's going to present to these three Jews the challenge of the chapter, the challenge that he is making to their god. His challenge is, who is the god or who is the god who can deliver you from my hand? I'm more powerful than any god you might have. There is no god who can deliver you.

That's a challenge that the god of Israel will take. As we move through the chapter, he will respond in resounding ways, and Nebuchadnezzar will be left stunned and amazed at the power of this god. First of all, the king offers them a second chance to obey.

The three men are brought before them, and he's furious, but he says, is it true that you didn't fall down to worship? Here's a second chance. We'll start it all over. We'll go back to the beginning.

We'll play the music. Then you fall down and worship. But if you don't, in case you missed it the first time, you'll be cast into the fire.

Who is the god who will deliver you from my hand? Why was he lenient with them? Why didn't he just throw them in the fire? They disobeyed. They were treasonous. The text doesn't say.

It may be because he's already invested a significant amount of time, effort, and even resources in training these civil servants. So maybe he wants to keep them, or maybe he just wants them to conform. He doesn't want to give them the satisfaction of disobeying him.

I don't know. It's interesting to think about. But his suggestion to them in this challenge is that he is more powerful than any god that's out there.

That is quite a claim. This is a human king claiming to be more powerful than any god these three men might be serving. Who really has the power? Nebuchadnezzar claims to have ultimate power, and the god of Israel has been challenged to respond to that.

This actually sounds similar to a story we have back in 2 Kings where the Assyrians were occupying around Jerusalem and Sennacherib had Hezekiah. I think the inscription says something like a caged bird in Jerusalem. There was no place to go.

They were going to lose. And Sennacherib's captain mocked the people in Jerusalem. Has any god of any nation ever delivered someone from Sennacherib's hand? It's almost an echo of what... or this is almost an echo in Daniel of what Sennacherib's captain had said to the Jerusalemites.

The king of Assyria is so powerful that there is no god who can deliver. Then we get to this very famous text passage where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego speak. What's interesting in this chapter is this is the only time they speak.

It's the only thing they say that we hear, and it's all three of them together. In this chapter, it's not Shadrach; over here is Meshach, and Abednego. They are like one character together.

In some ways they are representative of a faithful Jew. Just as a unit they represent this faithful Jew. This is actually a difficult text.

It's got a few issues, a few problems, things that translators actually aren't quite sure what to do with. So, let's talk through what some of those are.

The very first one comes when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar. That does not sound like proper protocol. You would never just say to a king, O Nebuchadnezzar. You would say, O King Nebuchadnezzar, live forever or whatever protocol all went along with that.

But you would never just address the king by his name. So, there are two approaches to this, and it has to do with how the Aramaic is and how the accents go. I'm not going to go into all of that.

I'm just going to say that the two ways translators deal with this are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who said to King Nebuchadnezzar, and then they say we do not need to defend ourselves. Or Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said O Nebuchadnezzar. Some translations will include this king, and some won't.

What's the difference? Well, you can see even structurally what the difference is. Here, they don't use his title king. Here, they're not actually in their speech saying his name at all.



This is more respectful. The only thing that would have been even more respectful is if they said, O King Nebuchadnezzar, live forever. But at least here, they aren't just saying his name.

They haven't just plowed in and addressed him. Here, you almost have what sounds like imprudence or impudence. This disrespect, actually.

So, the way you read this actually affects how you read the rest of what they say. If they're speaking to King Nebuchadnezzar with this chip on their shoulder, you're going to read everything else they say with this defensive tone. He overhears a dialogue between holy ones.

Okay, so the vision block begins in verse 5 and goes through 14. Let me read it for us. As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west across the face of the whole earth without touching the ground, and the goat had a conspicuous horn between his eyes.

He came to the ram with two horns, which I had seen standing on the bank of the canal, and he ran at him in his powerful wrath. I saw him come close to the ram, and he was enraged against him. He struck the ram and broke his two horns. And the ram had no power to stand before him, but he cast him to the ground and trampled on him.

And there was no one who could rescue the ram from his power. Then the goat became exceedingly strong, and when he was strong, the great horn was broken. And instead of it, there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven.

And out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, toward the glorious land. It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them.

It became great, even as great as the prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it, together with the regular burnt offering, because of transgression.

And it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper. Then I heard a holy one speaking. And another holy one said to the one who spoke, For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot? He said to me, For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings.

Then, the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state. All right. So, he sees this one-horned goat charging from the west, and is introduced with Hinei, or surprise, here comes this one-horned goat.

And it races across the land. The Hebrew is something like, and nothing was touching the ground. So, it's almost, you could almost say it flew.

It flew across the ground, across the land. It has one huge horn between its eyes. It comes up to the two-horned ram, and it runs at it with furious strength.

We aren't told why this goat is so angry, but it races toward this ram. Then, Daniel starts the next individual vision, which is the rampage of the goat. He says this goat was enraged.

It struck the ram. It broke the ram's two horns. It tore it down.

It trampled it. This is a mad goat. The reason the ram could succeed at all of this is because, or sorry, the goat could succeed because the ram had no power.

Just as no beast had any power against the ram, now the ram has no power against the goat. And just as there was no one to deliver the other beasts from the ram, now there's no one to deliver the ram from the goat. And the goat continues.

And this language just keeps getting bigger and bigger. It magnifies itself, and it's reaching to the hosts of heaven. And at the peak of its strength, the single horn of the goat is broken.

And out of that single horn come four horns, arising to the four winds of heaven, going in every direction. And then, out of one of those, we have a smaller horn. Some translations will say a little horn.

That's what the ESV says. There's a smaller horn, a little horn, coming out from one of the four. And that's what the rest of this vision block is concerned with, the little horn.

The four big horns just sort of disappear from the vision. They're not important. What the vision cares about is this little horn.

This little horn rises and becomes great. It grows exceedingly. It says it grew exceedingly in three directions, which would be impossible to do all at once.

So, it's probably describing the simultaneous reaching. It goes first to the south, then to the east, and then toward the glorious land, the ESV says. Other translations say toward the beautiful.

Beautiful or beautiful land is a reference to Israel and to Jerusalem specifically. We find that other places in the Old Testament. And the reason Jerusalem is beautiful is not because of its scenery.

Sometimes, the earth is actually not very beautiful at all. But it's beautiful because that's the place where Yahweh chose to put his name. That's where Yahweh dwelled among his people.

That's why it's beautiful. This little horn grows as far as the host of heaven, which is probably a reference to that divine assembly that served under Yahweh, serves before his throne. And also, that fights on Israel's behalf.

We have the host of heaven that fights for Israel in the book of Joshua and 1 Kings. And again, in language you don't quite understand, this little horn causes some of the stars and some of the hosts to fall. So, you have what we're going to learn is a human king causing stars and hosts to fall.

And it tramples them. And honestly, verses 11 and 12, if you were to line up four different translations and read them, they would all deal with a little bit differently. It's really difficult in Hebrew.

The syntax is hard; the vocabulary is hard, and the grammar is hard. It's difficult. We have a general idea of what happens.

Nobody doubts that, but all the details are hard to be too sure about. It says this little horn even magnifies itself to the prince of the host. Some translations will say the commander of the host.

And everyone agrees that that's a reference to God. The commander of the host is a reference to God. We'll come back to that when we get to the actual interpretation.

From this, the commander of the host is taken away, says, the ESV says, the regular burnt offering. That's reflecting another somewhat difficult word. It's tamid.

In some literal translations, it's called the continual. But it's a reference to the daily sacrifices that happened in the Jerusalem temple, which happened twice a day.

They happen in the morning, and they happen in the evening. And the command itself about making those sacrifices is that they were to be offered continually. So that word tamid is the continually part.

So, in the book of Daniel, it just represents those sacrifices. So, back to what happens here. The little horn takes away from the commander the regular sacrifice.

And it says the place of the sanctuary, the place of the commander's sanctuary, was thrown down. Then, the host was given over, along with the daily sacrifice. And it gives the reason for all of these things happening.

It says it happens because of transgression. Well, who's transgression? That's actually a huge question. Is it the transgression of the host? Is it the transgression of the people the host represents? So, God's people? Is it the transgression of Antiochus ultimately? The transgression of the little horn? Whose transgression is it? We don't know.

There's disagreement. Commentators will go both ways. And this will come up again.

The word transgression appears three times in this chapter. And trying to identify whose transgression is a little tricky. Even though this little horn is described with these words of these grandiose words, this little horn seems to have unlimited power.

But there are some subtle hints in the text that this power and this success is actually being allowed to the little horn. That the little horn is not the one who's just conquering the world. But some hand behind the little horn is allowing it to conquer the world.

For example, with the recounting of this little horn's greatest achievements. So, taking away the burnt offering, throwing down its sanctuary. In the Hebrew that's actually told with passive verbs.

So, it's taken away, which is subtle. This chapter is very subtle in its encouragement. Sometimes, I call it stingy comfort.

It's there, but you kind of have to work to get it. There's still a lot of suffering that goes on. So, this little horn has great power, but there's just a little hint that the power is allowed.

It's allowed to have the power. It doesn't take the power. And that's something that fits within this theology of Daniel.

Where you have great human kings. You have Nebuchadnezzar, who's this great king, but he is allowed to be king. His power is derived from God.

God grants it to him. So that's a theme of the book, and it fits right in with the theme here. It says that the little horn cast truth to the ground.

We'll come back to what that means when the angel gets around to it. It says the little horn, it did, and it succeeded. Or whatever it wanted to do, it did.

It prospered, just like the ram had done. No limits. There is one statement that's not repeated in this description of the little horn.

So, I said that in the description of the ram and the description of the goat, there were several repeated statements, such as no one could stand against it. That's also said of the little horn. And then a statement that there was none to deliver from that creature, from that beast.

That statement is not said of the little horn. No one could deliver from his hand. It's said of the ram.

It's said of the goat. It's not said of the little horn. But you'd think that it would be true, right? Here we have: if no one can stand against the goat, no one can stand against the ram; the little horn is even greater.

Of course, there was no one to deliver from that, from the power. But the vision doesn't say that. It doesn't bother to say it.

And you always want to be careful when you make an argument from silence, just because the vision doesn't say it. But I kind of wonder if that's another one of those subtle hints that there was someone who could have delivered from the little horn, but he stayed his hand. And if their god does not deliver them, Nebuchadnezzar, this powerful king, is shown to really be powerless because he couldn't even get these three men, these three measly captives; he's not powerful enough to get them to bow down to him.

So, he's really shown to be weak, just by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response. They have more power than the king does, and their god has more power than the king does. Well, you can imagine that Nebuchadnezzar does not respond well to this in verses 19 and 20.

He makes a second display of power in this chapter. He's furious, and he's filled with wrath. This chapter loves these hot words.

And you have the king getting angry, he's enraged, you have the furnace getting hot, then you have the king get angrier, and you have the furnace get hotter, and it's almost like, which is hotter, the king or the furnace? There's just blown up. It says he heated it seven times hotter. Again, can't measure that.

Seven is the number of completion. So, this furnace is as hot as it can possibly be. And who does he call on to throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fire? Some of his mightiest men.

Here's another show of power. And what happens when they throw them in? His mightiest men fall dead. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fall in alive and live through it.

What's the point of talking about all these clothes they're wearing? Probably just to show you how flammable they are. These guys are wearing all sorts of baggy clothes. They've got cloaks, tunics, hats, and other garments.

And they're bound up. There's no way they should escape. And yet, they come out without even a smell of smoke on them.

That's jumping ahead. So, Nebuchadnezzar makes this grand display of his power, and he really ends up looking kind of foolish. He just killed some of the mightiest men he had.

It's this caricature of the king, so angry. He's just a maniac. Verse 21-25, God responds to Nebuchadnezzar's display of power, and he makes his own display of power instead.

And in this section, we have this contrast between these men. There are two groups of these men, or your translation might say those men. Translations vary.

It refers to Shadrach, Meshach, and Bendigo several times. Then, it also refers to the mighty men. So, these men took these men and threw them into the fire, and these men dropped dead, and these men walked around.

So, you've got this contrast of these mighty men of Nebuchadnezzar and these weak, bound captives. And yet, which ones come out on top? The king leaps to his feet when this happens. He sees four men.

Now, the text does not tell us if anybody else saw this fourth man. All we know is that Nebuchadnezzar reports seeing him. He asks his officials, How many men? Did we throw in three? Oh, yes, king, we threw in three.

Well, the king could have said, didn't we throw in 20? And they probably would have said, oh, yes, king, we threw in 20. No one's going to disagree with Nebuchadnezzar at this point in the story. He sees this fourth man.

And whether Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw the fourth man, we don't actually know. It doesn't tell us. The only one who reports seeing the fourth man is Nebuchadnezzar.

We'll talk about why that is significant when we get to the end of the chapter. Nebuchadnezzar says that this fourth man has the appearance of the son of the gods. There are a couple of translations out there that will say the appearance of the son of God.

That is actually not a good rendering of what's in the Aramaic. It's a son of the gods. What Nebuchadnezzar means is that he is looking at what he considers to be a supernatural being.

He will later say God sent his angel. So, he sees this fourth figure as a divine being. And it's a member of what we might call the class of gods.

This is not a human being, along with the other three human beings. Notice that the men are not rescued from the fire. They are not saved from going into the fire.

They fall right into it. But they are with a divine being in the fire. I just want to caution you when you read this chapter, or you teach this chapter or whatever, that you don't use this story as a promise that God will deliver faithful people.

I've heard that. I've heard it applied that way. Oh, they were faithful, so God delivered them.

I'm not sure that's why God delivered them. God delivered them for his own glory. To display his own power over this king.

If they hadn't been faithful, he still might have delivered them. According to some of these translations, he might have. What if you are faithful and you end up being martyred? Does that mean your faith wasn't great enough? I don't think we want to say to the martyrs of the church that they weren't faithful enough.

That's why God didn't deliver them. That's not the message of the chapter. It's describing—remember, it's describing how God worked and what happened.

It's not prescribing that if you do this, then God will do this. So, just a caution. Then we get to the last section.

Nebuchadnezzar calls them out. They don't have a cent on them. The witnesses to that are the Satraps, Prefects, Governors, and Counselors.

They all gather together, but they don't see any evidence that they were in the fire. Except there's one piece of evidence. They were in the fire.

Their ropes had fallen off. Their ropes had been burned off. So, they were free.

They were walking around in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar is very impressed by this. He makes this really great doxology.

A statement about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And for the first part of his statement, you're like, wow, Nebuchadnezzar, you're making progress. Praise, blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

He sent his angel. He delivered his servants who trusted in him. They set aside the king's command.

They gave up their bodies rather than serve and worship any God but their own. Yay, Nebuchadnezzar! And then he says, therefore I make a decree. If anybody speaks anything against this God, I'm going to tear you limb from limb.

So, Nebuchadnezzar is learning, but he's learning in small steps. In chapter 2, he learned that the God of Daniel was able to reveal mysteries. That God had superior knowledge to anything he had ever seen before.

In this chapter, he encounters the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who have superior power. Who's the God who can deliver you from my hand? Answer: the God of Israel. The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

He is impressed by that. I want to return for just a second to this question of the fourth man. This fourth figure in the fire.

What was he doing there, and why was he there? Did God need that fourth figure in the fire to save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? No. He could have just spared them, right? That fourth figure is walking around with them. He's not shielding them.

He's not covering them with fireproof anything. He's just there with them. God didn't need that.

God's the one that delivered the men, not the fourth figure. So, what was the angel doing there at all? Well, in the text, like I said, the only one who sees or acknowledges seeing it is Nebuchadnezzar. That fourth figure was there for Nebuchadnezzar.

It was there for his benefit. Two things it did for Nebuchadnezzar. First of all, it showed the king the display of God's power.



It's not just these three men who didn't just fall in the fire and by their own power not get burned, but there's a fourth figure, a fourth divine figure there. This is showing Nebuchadnezzar the power of the God to deliver, the God that he challenged even existing. The second thing I think this figure did for Nebuchadnezzar is it kept him from thinking that the power was in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

They were not the ones who delivered themselves. They were not gods. So that fourth figure, for whatever other reasons it may have been there, maybe it comforted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we don't know.

Maybe everybody else saw it, and we don't know. What the narrator cares about is that Nebuchadnezzar saw this fourth figure because God was showing him that he was the one with the power. He was answering Nebuchadnezzar's challenge.

So, at the end of this chapter, what are its main points for us, its takeaway value? I think this message of idolatry is the image that Nebuchadnezzar set up. No matter what it was going to cost God's followers, they weren't going to bow down. They were going to be faithful no matter what. Genuine commitment to God is one of the principles.

Because he's God, because he's worthy, because he demands it, not for whatever benefit you might gain from it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not committed because they were going to be saved. They did not see this as their fire insurance, so to speak.

They were committed because he was God, and they were going to follow him no matter what. I think a second thing just to keep in mind is faithfulness does not guarantee deliverance. In fact, when we get to chapters 8 through 12 of Daniel, we're going to see God's people suffer even greater things than these three guys suffered.

We're going to see martyrs. We're going to see people who have no hope for them apart from cataclysmic restoration by God. But even in the midst of whatever suffering there is, God was with these three, and he is with us.

And I'm not taking that promise just from Daniel 3. The Bible assures us in some other very clear passages that God is with us. God is with his people. That's the hope of persecuted believers.

We'll come back and do chapter 4.

This is Dr. Wendy Whitter in her teaching on the book of Daniel. This is session 6, Daniel 3, God's Superior Power and His Servant's Faithfulness.