

# The Book of Daniel

## Week 3: Chapters 3 & 4

### Chapter 3

#### **Verses 1-7:**

Based on the themes we've seen in the first two chapters of Daniel, what theme is extremely prevalent in Chapter 3 (because it's completely missing in verses 1-7)? Or: why did Nebuchadnezzar want to build a golden statue (perhaps of himself)?

Pride OR lack of humility. Clearly Nebuchadnezzar had gained confidence since we first read about him in chapters 1 and 2, and now he's beginning to make very bold, rash decisions. A statue like this would cost a lot of money and take a lot of work for virtually no payoff. The statue wouldn't actually do anything to make Nebuchadnezzar wiser, make his armies stronger, etc. So the only thing this statue could be about is pride.

Now, you may be asking: what about reverence? Maybe it's not about pride in himself, but reverence to God, or whatever gods he's serving. Well, that certainly is a possibility in any situation like this one, but that will be answered in the next section. Until then, let's ponder another question.

Nebuchadnezzar decided to erect a large golden statue in an open plain in Babylon. He then calls many people to come worship it. What socio-civic lesson (taught in chapter 1) are we reminded of by which groups Nebuchadnezzar calls first? Why were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chosen to be a part of that group of people?

Nebuchadnezzar chose the best of the best to be the first to bow down to his image. Obviously he wanted all people to bow down, but, again, Babylonian rulers were smart. They knew the best way to get the people to follow was to have the important people do it first. Thus, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would be thrust into the spotlight for being a part of this group of people.

#### **Verses 8-15:**

Why did the Chaldeans feel it was necessary to tell on the Jews who didn't bow to the statue?

Jealousy, they didn't like that certain Jews were promoted to higher positions despite being outsiders. Greed, they saw this as an opportunity to get in the king's good graces. Anger, perhaps they actually believed in the Babylonian gods and saw this as heresy.

In verse 12, the question about pride vs. reverence is finally answered. What do those Chaldeans say (and how do they say it) that tells the reader this whole situation is about pride, not necessarily reverence?

Their use of the word "you". They said, "They pay no attention to YOU... YOUR gods... YOU have set up." These wise Chaldeans certainly know why the king erected the statue and gave the order, and they play right into that with their response.

What is strange about Nebuchadnezzar's response to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in verse 14? What might the reader expect to be different after what happened in chapter 2?

The king called Daniel's God THE God. He recognized the power that Daniel was granted and wanted to be reverent to the one who granted that power. But here he doesn't seem to recognize that. He calls them "my gods", very generic idols. On the other hand, we do recognize that Nebuchadnezzar called Yahweh God OF gods, meaning he still probably held the Babylonian gods in high esteem, and therefore this isn't surprising that he made a statue "to them".

What's also strange about his response is that he probably knew that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego followed the same God Daniel did (because they were Jews), but that didn't influence his decision. It's possible that because this event happened probably 9-10 years after chapter 2, the king forgot about/didn't care about the interpretation. If that God isn't constantly helping the king, who cares, right?

Based on what we know about Babylonian kings, what's strange about Nebuchadnezzar's response in verse 15? What might this tell us about him?

Instead of just throwing them in the fire, he actually gives them another chance. There seems to be no logical reason for this except that he doesn't actually want them to burn. Maybe they have served him well over the years. Maybe he knows they're connected to one of his most trusted officials: Daniel. Here, in what others might call a moment of weakness, the king extends an olive branch to these traitorous Jews for some reason.

### **Verses 16-30:**

How does Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response to the king show the depth of their faith? What surprising acknowledgment do they make? (Hint: vs. 18)

They say that they won't bow down to the idol even if God DOESN'T save them. Their faith isn't quid pro quo. They don't trust God because He gives them things. They trust Him even if He doesn't.

Why did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response make Nebuchadnezzar so mad?

1. What they said: They weren't just placing their God above his gods, but above the king himself.
2. How they said it: They said, "we have no need to answer you in this matter".

Because of this the king cranked up the heat and bound the three men, ensuring that no funny business would happen. Then they were thrown into a fire so hot that the guards in charge of throwing them in died from the heat.

*Fun Fact: "Seven times hotter" doesn't mean literally seven times the temperature. Daniel uses numbers symbolically (as we'll see in later chapters), and the number 7 is used to convey completeness or entirety. Therefore, "seven times hotter" just means "as hot as possible".*

What happened in the furnace that reminded Nebuchadnezzar of Daniel and his blessings and how do we know that's what the king was reminded of? (hint: what does the king refer to the three men as when he calls to them?)

The three men were not only not burning/screaming/dying, but they were walking around with another man, one who was not like any human. This immediately triggered a memory in the king of someone doing something that a normal man shouldn't be able to do. How we know he was reminded of Daniel specifically is because he called the three men "servants of the Most High God", which is the lesson he learned from Daniel interpreting his dream. Nebuchadnezzar remembered who the Jewish God was and just what power he was dealing with.

Note the absolute protection that everyone around them witnessed. Not only were these three men protected from being burned, but not even the smell of fire was on them. It's like they literally had an impenetrable bubble around them that not even scents could pass through. What two things does this lead the king to do?

1. Praise the God who delivered them, recognizing God's power was far above his own.
2. Make a command against blaspheming the Jewish God. (remember this one)

The chapter ends with a bit of consistency on the part of the king. Just as he rewarded Daniel for his God's faithfulness and power, so here he rewards Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for their God's faithfulness and power. The king, unlike God, is very quid pro quo. Here God uses that pitfall for His own purposes of spreading the Gospel.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Verses 1-3:**

What in these opening verses tells us that Nebuchadnezzar remembers the events of chapters 2 and 3 (because this letter is dated around 20-30 years after those first two events)?

He calls God "Most High". He refers to his signs and wonder. He references the kingdom that God showed him in his dream. Clearly the reminder from last chapter stuck with him.

What's unique about chapter 4 compared to the previous three chapters? (hint: who's writing?)

Nebuchadnezzar is writing in first person. It is likely that Nebuchadnezzar issued a missive to be written for the purpose of teaching everyone in his lands. What is that lesson and why is it important? Well, that's what the missive is for! So let's read.

### **Verses 4-18:**

Why does Nebuchadnezzar begin his letter by reminding the people of his first dream? What might he be reinforcing with this introduction?

By referencing the first interpretation event, he is building a foundation that Daniel and his God is trustworthy. Because he was able to miraculously do something the first time, the reader should expect that he will do something again this time, because why else talk about him in the letter? And the king wants people to trust Daniel and his God, otherwise he wouldn't start by painting them in positive light.

That being said, How does the reader know that Nebuchadnezzar still doesn't fully trust Daniel's God? (hint: how does he refer to Daniel's Babylonian name?)

He says that "Belteshazzar" was named "after the name of my god". Nebuchadnezzar still seems to hold Daniel's God in high regard (as we saw at the beginning of chapter 4), but he's still polytheistic. Daniel's God isn't the *only* god, and therefore isn't being fully trusted by the king.

Nebuchadnezzar's second dream is about a tree. What made the tree so valuable?

It was tall, beautiful, and had abundant fruit and leaves. It also gave shelter and food to the birds and animals.

In this dream, the king sees a watcher come down from heaven and command the tree be destroyed. Who is doing the destroying and what does this tell us about what the tree represents?

Angels are doing the destroying (the imperatives are plural). If the angels and holy watcher are destroying the tree, then the tree must be someone/something in opposition to God.

After the tree is cut down and destroyed, all that remains is a stump. Whatever was in opposition to God is now a shell of its former self. We see in the dream that it's bound with iron and bronze. I'll tell you even before we get to the interpretation, this part is never explained. Perhaps it was meant to refer to literal bindings (like chains) that the "stump" would need later. Maybe it is meant to represent strength, that the stump would continue to persevere. Whatever it is meant to represent, it's not important enough to be explained. It's most likely something that those present would have easily connected, but didn't feel the need to include in a retelling of the story.

The vision goes on to clarify that the stump is indeed representative of a person, specifically a man ("his"). What does the vision show happening to the man after being cut down and stripped of his power?

He will not only be equal to the beasts of the field, but his mind will literally change to be like one of them.

Critical Thinking: What might the "seven periods of time" that pass over the man after he has become a beast represent?

The seven days of creation. We know that "seven" refers to completion. Being cursed for "seven periods of time" is likely a reference to the fallen man being re-created.

Bonus: Verse 17 has been debated by Biblical scholars wondering who was actually commanding/carrying out the order to destroy the tree. What have we learned this past year that helps us understand who the "watchers" might be?

Looking at the spiritual beings in the Bible and the book of Job, we know that God has a heavenly council that he confers with, thus the watchers are very likely the council members. They are a group of spiritual beings that are giving orders for others to follow out. That seems to fit perfectly with what we know of the holy council in God's throne room.

**Verses 19-27:**

Note: From verses 19-33 the perspective changes from first person to third. After letting the reader see that the king was writing a missive, it is likely that Daniel altered the missive so that the reader would see the whole story of the interpretation.

Why was Daniel hesitant to tell the king the interpretation of the dream? How did Daniel show compassion and respect to the king when he began his interpretation?

Daniel clearly knew the dream was about the king and he was afraid it would anger him. After being coaxed to respond, Daniel began by wishing the dream not upon the king, but upon the king's enemies.

Parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's first dream, like the golden head of the statue, Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that the tree represents him. Despite the following news being mostly negative (tree cut, king will be a beast in the field), what hope is proclaimed in the interpretation?

The stump is left and the curse is given a specific time frame. The dream is negative, but there are limitations to the negatives that will happen.

What does Daniel say in the interpretation of that hope? How will Nebuchadnezzar know when the curse will end?

He will remember who is the Most High God.

### **Verses 28-37:**

What poetic justice event in these verses causes the fulfillment of the dream to begin?

The king, walking around, looking at all the land he is in charge of, once again becomes filled with pride. He opens his mouth and does what he commanded the people not to do in chapter 3. He blasphemes the Jewish God and says, "Look at all that I have done. Look at everything that brings ME glory." More specifically, he directly contradicts what God has told him twice and will now tell him a third time, "the Most High rules the kingdom of men."

What this tells us is that the king brought this upon himself. It wasn't just a random prophecy, but God looked into the heart of Nebuchadnezzar and saw his unfaithfulness. What's surprising is that he gave the king an entire year to turn from his ways. But the king doesn't and he blasphemes against God and all that God has blessed Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon with in his lifetime. Therefore, the exact curse seen in the dream happens.

What happened that ending the curse?

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged that God was the one in control. Because he remembered that God was the ruler of the nations, he was granted his authority and kingdom again and actually learned a lesson this time.

Daniel ends chapter 4 with Nebuchadnezzar's lesson from this story. What is the lesson the king learned? Is that the same or different from the lesson Jewish readers would learn from this story?

The king finally learned humility, which Daniel has been preaching all along. But the Jewish readers would learn ANOTHER lesson. They would learn humility, but this was also a HUGE lesson about hope. What happened to Nebuchadnezzar is a very obvious depiction of the Israelites and their exile. Think about it.

Nebuchadnezzar/The Israelites:

The problem: Unfaithfulness

The result: Exile

The solution: Faithfulness

The conclusion: Restoration

If God was willing to do this for a foreign king, how much more hope would the exiles have that he would do it for them? They get an extra lesson from Daniel here.

This ends the first half of our chiasm. In chapter 2 we saw a vision from God and Daniel interpreting it, showing God's power. Then we saw a story about the pride of king Nebuchadnezzar, and God humbling him. Finally, we saw a story about both God's power over visions/prophecies AND the pride of man, but this time tied to a very clear story of redemption and hope. So these three chapters build off one another and each teach another lesson.