

# Daniel

## Chapter 3

### *Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image*

**King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. 2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and 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 King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 Then the satraps, the prefects, and 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 King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 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 golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” 7 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 peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.**

Luth: “Daniel again records a great miracle of faith. There the three men are preserved in the fiery furnace, so that God is confessed and praised by the king [Nebuchadnezzar] throughout the entire realm, even in writing. This, too, happened for the consolation of the Jews [Judeans] who, along with their God, were despised nobodies at Babylon under the tyrants and false gods. But now their God is highly honored above all gods, in order that they may firmly believe that at the proper time he can and will indeed save them, and meanwhile hold fast to and console themselves with this honor he receives and this miracle he performs” (AE 35:297). (TLSB)

**3:1** *made an image* – While the text does not state Nebuchadnezzar’s motive, we can almost be certain that he wanted to impress his officials with the golden statue and ordered that they worship it as a demonstration of their fealty to him as their king. We are not told what the statue represented. Since it was gold, some commentators have speculated that it was a statue of Nebuchadnezzar himself, since he was the head of gold in the dream in Daniel 2. However, the statements of the officials, Nebuchadnezzar, and the three Judeans later in this narrative equate veneration of the statue with worship of Nebuchadnezzar’s “gods” (3:12, 14, 18; see also 3:28). These statements appear to indicate that this statue was of one of Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian gods, probably his patron god, who would also be a representative of the entire Babylonian pantheon. The statue may have been of Marduk (also called Bel) or the god after whom Nebuchadnezzar was named, Nabu. (CSB)

*image of gold.* Large statues of this kind were not made of solid gold but were plated with gold. (CSB)

Probably of the Babylonian god Bel. (TLSB)

*height was sixty cubits.* Including the lofty pedestal on which it no doubt stood. (CSB)

C 90 ft tall and 9 ft in diameter. (TLSB)

*set ... up.* Repeated often in ch 3, as are other terms and phrases that suggest satire in the telling of the story. The false god could not make or present himself. (TLSB)

*Dura.* Either the name of a place now marked by a series of mounds (located a few miles south of Babylon) or a common noun meaning “walled enclosure.” (CSB)

Akkadian word meaning “fortress,” a name given to many locations. Probably near the city of Babylon. (TLSB)

**3:2** The seven classifications of government officials were to pledge full allegiance to the newly established empire as they stood before the image. The image probably represented the god Nabu, whose name formed the first element in Nebuchadnezzar’s name (in Akkadian *Nabu-kudurri-usur*, meaning “Nabu, protect my son!” or “Nabu, protect my boundary!”). (CSB)

Exact meaning of the seven named offices is uncertain; perhaps listed in order of descending importance. (TLSB)

*dedication.* Significant public event. (TLSB)

**3:4** *peoples, nations, and languages.* Indicating the multiracial, multiethnic composition of the empire. (TLSB)

**3:5** The words for “zither,” “harp” and “pipes” are the only Greek loanwords in Daniel. Greek musicians and instruments are mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions written before the time of Nebuchadnezzar. (CSB)

Ensemble of three wind and three stringed instruments provided ceremonial music. (TLSB)

*fall down and worship.* Aram *sagad*; used of Nebuchadnezzar paying homage to Daniel and often in Dn. Isaiah used the related Hbr term to describe idol worship (Is 44:15–19; 46:6). (TLSB)

**3:6** *burning fiery furnace* – Furnaces in ancient Mesopotamia included not only small household ovens for baking food but also much larger furnaces used for firing bricks (brick kilns) and refining metals (smelters). Brick kilns and smelters often were very large, with room enough for several people. They had openings at the top through which material could be added to the furnace as well as entrances at the bottom through which finished products could be extracted. (CC)

Burning as a method of execution (3:6) is attested throughout the ancient world, including among Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks. Note that Jeremiah, Daniel’s older contemporary, specifically mentions burning as a punishment employed by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 29:22). (CC)

Probably a smelting kiln with openings on the top and side. Burning was an ancient method of execution (cf Lv 20:14; 21:9). (TLSB)

**3:7** *fell down and worshiped* – Dan 3:7 essentially repeats the language of 3:5 to highlight the instant and total obedience of the gathered officials. They do not question the proclamation, nor do they appear to have any qualms about worshiping Nebuchadnezzar’s idol. By portraying all the other provincial officials as flat, colorless, mindless characters who have no individual religious loyalty, but blindly follow the pagan religion of their king, Daniel sets up a powerful contrast to the uncompromising loyalty of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the one true God. (CC)

**3:1–7** Nebuchadnezzar builds a golden statue and at its dedication commands all people to worship it. Such worship is forbidden in the First Commandment (Ex 20:3–6). Today, the gods we are tempted to worship may take subtler forms: ma<sup>8</sup> Therefore at that time certain Chaldean things, power, self. Only one “image” brings life and salvation—the incarnate Son of God (Col 1:15–20). • Triune God, may I never worship anyone or anything but You alone. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Fiery Furnace*

**3:8** Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. **9** They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! **10** 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 golden image. **11** And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. **12** 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 golden image that you have set up.” **13** Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. **14** Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? **15** 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. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” **16** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. **17** If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **18** But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” **19** 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. **20** And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. **21** Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. **22** 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. **23** And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. **24** Then King Nebuchadnezzar 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.” **25** 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.” **26** Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. **27** 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 come upon them. **28** 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. **29** 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.” **30** Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

**3:8** *certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews* – The Aramaic phrase כָּל־הַגִּבּוֹל הַזֶּה, literally, “all because of this,” here signals a change in circumstances within the narrative, so it is translated “then” (3:8). It draws attention to the “Chaldean men” first mentioned here, at the start of this new scene within the chapter. By emphasizing that they are “*Chaldean men*” and by using the idiom rendered “maliciously accused” (see the textual note on 3:8), Daniel the author is implying that their motives are not simply to protect the king’s interests, but also to attack the Judeans out of jealousy. These Chaldeans may have felt the Judeans were given positions that should not have gone to conquered foreigners, but to native Babylonians. (CC)

They no doubt felt professional jealousy against these Judeans who had positions of authority (v 12; 2:49). (TLSB)

**3:12** *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*. Referred to only by their Babylonian names. Daniel was evidently not present for the ceremony. (TLSB)

*pay no attention to you...worship the image*. They obeyed the word of God (Ex 20:3–5) above the word of the king. (CSB)

Note the personal references. Their failure to worship the image was an affront to Nebuchadnezzar. (TLSB)

Their accusation against the Judeans in 3:12 consists of three related charges: (CC)

1. They do not heed the king’s royal authority. (“These men do not pay attention to you, Your Majesty.”)
2. They do not serve the king’s gods. (“Your gods they do not serve.”)
3. They do not bow down to the gold statue. (“The statue of gold that you set up they do not worship.”)

The first charge focuses on the civil authority of the king, and the second and third charges focus on his religious authority. In the ancient Near East, the king was expected to be the highest authority in both the realms of the government and the national religion, which were inseparably intertwined (the opposite of the modern Western idea of the separation of church and state). The second and third charges are coordinated and illustrate the first charge: by their religious disobedience, the Judeans disregard the king’s royal authority and decree. In order to emphasize the two particular religious infractions as affronts to the king, they place the direct objects at the beginning of the clauses: literally, “*your gods they do not serve, and the statue of gold that you set up they do not worship*” (3:12). Their appeal is directly to Nebuchadnezzar’s person and authority in order to ensure that their accusation would not be simply dismissed as politicking motivated by jealousy. This is reinforced by their appeal to the exact wording of the royal decree (3:10–11), so that they could show a basis for their accusation in royal law. (CC)

YOUR GODS – the emphatic placement of “your gods” in the accusation in 3:12 highlights that what is at stake is not simply civil authority (the king’s royal power), but religious loyalty and theological belief. This emphasis will become even more prominent in the king’s interrogation of the men in 3:14–15. (CC)

**3:13-15** Nebuchadnezzar’s fierce anger is depicted for a second time in Daniel (the first was in 2:12). His fury demands that he confront the Judeans. His prestige depends on his being able to obtain obedience from everyone whom he has appointed. Therefore, instead of simply having Shadrach, Meshach, and

Abednego executed, he is willing to give them an opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty. At the same time, he repeats the threat of execution for disobedience. His offer is an attempt to demonstrate in public, in full view of the other assembled officials, that his appointment of these men (2:49) was not bad judgment on his part. Instead, he is attempting to demonstrate bad judgment on their part. (CC)

In 3:15 Nebuchadnezzar is asking, “Then what god *will* save you from my hand?” He is not stating that no god can rescue, but that he does not believe any (lesser) god is willing to rescue the Judeans, since they have refused to honor his (more powerful) gods. Thus Nebuchadnezzar is implicitly asserting the superiority of his own gods. They are more powerful than the God of the Judeans, as has already been proven (in his estimation) by his conquest of Jerusalem and his plundering of the temple of the Judeans’ God (1:1–2). He is implicitly affirming his belief that his (victorious) gods have made him absolute monarch, and his will is the will of his gods. (CC)

The intent of this question is to taunt the Judeans’ faith. It is designed to dissuade them from trusting that their God will save them. Similarly, opponents taunted Christ to mock his faith that God the Father would eventually save him (Mt 27:43). Those Jewish opponents did not deny that God *could* save, but they believed God took no pleasure in the one who claimed to be his Son, and so God *would* not save him. Subsequent events proved both Nebuchadnezzar and those opponents wrong (Dan 3:24–27; Mt 28:1–20). (CC)

**3:13** *furious rage*. Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten his previous expressions of goodwill (2:46–49). (TLSB)

**3:15** *well and good*. Words added to the translation, which make clear Nebuchadnezzar’s offer. (TLSB)

*who is the god who will deliver you*. Nebuchadnezzar knew no god that could rescue these youths from the punishment he had decreed. (TLSB)

**3:16** *no need to answer you*. Their minds were made up. (TLSB)

*no need to answer you* – The three faithful Judeans begin their response by declaring that they have “no need” to answer the king (3:16). Their prior defiance of the king’s decree speaks for itself: they have not and will not worship the idol. Their refusal to explain their actions to the king may be an implicit appeal to a higher authority: their God. In the same way, Jesus refused to supply an answer when he was accused before human authorities (Mt 26:62–63; 27:12–14). While the refusal to do evil is a passive form of disobedience toward human leaders, it is a form of obedience to God and a testimony of trust in him (as Nebuchadnezzar will admit about the Judeans “who trusted” in their God [3:28]). He is the final Judge who will vindicate his oppressed people who have trusted in him (cf. Deut 32:36; Pss 26:1; 43:1). (CC)

**3:17** *If this be so*. If they must be cast into the fiery furnace. *our God ... deliver us*. The youths confessed that the God of Israel was able to save them. Ter: “O martyrdom even without suffering perfect! Enough did they suffer! enough were they burned, whom on this account God shielded, that it might not seem that they had given a false representation of His power” (ANF 3:640–41). Ambr: “What good friends those Hebrew children were whom the flames of the fiery furnace did not separate from their love of each other!” (NPNF 2 10:88). (TLSB)

The concluding thought of the Judeans in 3:17, while spoken to the king, contains their prayer to their God: “so let him save [us] from your hand, Your Majesty.” They are not demanding that God save them, nor are they stating that it is a certainty that God will save them from execution (as an imperfect verb would imply; their verb is a jussive). Instead, they are entrusting themselves to God’s powerful hand, for he—and he alone—is able to save them from Nebuchadnezzar’s hand. (CC)

**3:18** *if not be it known.* Whether God decides to rescue them (v. 17) or not, their faith is fully resigned to his will. (CSB)

There are times when it is not God's will to rescue believers from danger or death. Genuine faith trusts God whether or not He preserves believers when they face trials. E.g., consider how both the wicked and the righteous experienced suffering when God used Babylon to overthrow Judah. According to Church historians all the apostles except John were put to death for their faith. Cypr: "Let us imitate the three children Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, who, neither frightened by their youthful age nor broken down by captivity, Judea being conquered and Jerusalem taken, overcame the king by the power of faith.... This is the strength of courage and of faith, to believe and to know that God can deliver from present death, and yet not to fear death nor give way, that faith may be the more mightily proved" (ANF 5:348). (TLSB)

Their firm trust in God, whether or not he rescues them from physical death, is evident in the Judeans' final statement (3:18). Even if God should choose not to save them ("but if not"), they will worship him alone. Thus Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego demonstrate the same faith that godly martyrs have had throughout the millennia: only God can save them, and indeed, he will save them eternally. (CC)

Ultimately God will save the Judeans, and all who die in the faith, from an end far worse than temporal death. In 12:2–3 God will explicitly reveal to Daniel that God will raise all believers to eternal life. The hope of life after death is what enables the Judeans here to express their resolute determination to continue to serve God even if the penalty is (temporal, physical) death. They will gladly suffer death in this life in order to gain the promised life of the world to come. (CC)

The perfect expression of such unwavering faith is by Jesus himself, God the Son, who, during his state of humiliation on earth, was completely obedient to his Father's will, even unto death on a cross, then rose on the third day and was exalted at the right hand of his Father (Phil 2:6–11). (CC)

**3:19** *filled with fury* – Nebuchadnezzar's anger, shown to be explosive and vindictive already in 2:12, is on display yet again. The same Aramaic term for "rage" (ܢܘܪܐ) that was in 3:13 recurs in 3:19. The refusal of the three men to bow down to the idol was a personal affront as well as a public defiance of Nebuchadnezzar's authority. (CC)

*expression ... changed.* Because they defied Nebuchadnezzar's authority. (TLSB)

*expression of his face was changed* – The Aramaic literally says that "*the image* of his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" (3:19). This is a play on the same noun used for the "image, statue" (3:1 ,ܐܘܢܐ, etc.) that Nebuchadnezzar had erected. Daniel the author is once again showing a subtle, but unmistakable, criticism of pagan gods. They are even less than mortals. Nebuchadnezzar's image can change, but the image he set up for others to worship cannot. The god is less animated than its human creator! In contrast, the one true God—and his Son, Jesus Christ—always remains constant and faithful to his Word, and so he does not change (Mal 3:6; cf. Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Heb 13:8; James 1:17). (CC)

*heated seven times more.* The king's unreasonable rage is matched by the excesses of the raging furnace. (TLSB)

The temperature was controlled by the number of bellows forcing air into the fire chamber. Therefore sevenfold intensification was achieved by seven bellows pumping at the same time. But the expression "seven times hotter than usual" may have been figurative for "as hot as possible" (seven signifies completeness). (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar's rage leads him to order the furnace heated as hot as possible in order to emphasize the penalty for ignoring his demands. The phrase "seven times hotter" (3:19) is not to be understood literally, as if the Babylonians had some type of gauge to measure the temperature in the furnace and increased it by this exact multiple. Instead, the number is used symbolically to signal that the furnace is heated as hot as possible. This is the second instance of a symbolic use of a number in Daniel, and it prepares the reader for more extensive use of numbers in the symbolism of the visions later in the book. (CC)

The urgency of the royal command is demonstrated by the binding of the three men while they were still in their clothes. No time was taken to strip them before throwing them into the furnace. The urgency is compounded by the deaths of the choice men of Nebuchadnezzar's army who were overcome by the heat of the furnace as they rushed to throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fire. However, their deaths did not stop the order from being fulfilled, since apparently the Judeans were being thrown into the furnace from above. The escaping heat must have been intense as the Judeans tumbled into the furnace, bound and clothed. (CC)

**3:20** They were possibly cast into an opening on the top of the furnace. The front door (v 26) would be used for removing materials from the furnace. (TLSB)

**3:21** *bound in their ... garments.* These will testify to the miracle (v 27). (TLSB)

**3:22** In their rush to please the enraged king, the executioners failed to take proper precautions. (TLSB)

**3:23** Following this verse, the LXX included the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Holy Children. (TLSB)

**3:24-27** The text includes four indications of the miraculous deliverance of the Judeans. The first indication is anticipated by Nebuchadnezzar's question to his advisors: "Didn't we throw three men into the midst of the fire *bound*?" (3:24). Note the emphatic position of "bound" (ܒܢܘܢܝܢ) at the end of the question in Aramaic. After his advisors assure him that "certainly" the Judeans had been bound, he then states, "I see four men *loosed* and walking around" (3:25). Apparently the bonds had fallen off (cf. Acts 12:6-7; 16:25-26) or had been destroyed by the fire, so that the men could walk around—a clear indication that something miraculous has happened. (CC)

A second indication is that the men were unscathed, as proven by the king's observation that they were "walking around in the midst of the fire with no injury" (3:25). Further details about their miraculous preservation from the deadly power of the fire will be given in 3:27. (CC)

The third indication of the miraculous is the observation of a fourth person in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar immediately recognizes him as looking like "a son of gods" (3:25). The Aramaic unmistakably quotes the words of Nebuchadnezzar as true to his pagan view. In the larger context, Nebuchadnezzar had constructed a statue that represented his "gods" (3:12, 14, 18), and he required his subjects to worship it, so he lacked faith in the one true and triune God, nor was he even a monotheist. Thus it would be wrong for us to expect Nebuchadnezzar to describe the identity of the fourth person in language consistent with biblical theology and the full revelation of God the Son in the NT. (CC)

The fourth and most direct evidence of a miraculous deliverance is that the three men were able to escape from the furnace without any harm. They are able to obey the king's command to "come out!" (Dan 3:26) so that he and his advisers could carefully observe them up close. (The text does not say why Nebuchadnezzar only addresses the three men in 3:26; perhaps he discerned that the fourth, divine man was not under his authority and could not be made to obey his command.) Not only were the three not harmed, but Daniel is careful to tell us of the observation by the king and his courtiers that their hair and

clothes were intact and that they did not even smell of smoke (3:27). The power of God to protect his servants was made clear to all of Nebuchadnezzar's chief administrators, including his royal counselors. This may indicate that not only the high provincial officials, but also the men in the court at Babylon (including Daniel; see 2:49) witnessed the deliverance. (CC)

After checking on the execution by having the front of the furnace opened, the king himself announced the amazing miracle to his counselors. (TLSB)

**3:25** *four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire.* The three youths were not saved “from” the fire but “in” the fire. Like the burning bush (Ex 3:1–6), they were not consumed. (TLSB)

*son of the gods.* Nebuchadnezzar was speaking as a pagan polytheist and was content to conceive of the fourth figure as a lesser heavenly being (v. 28) sent by the all-powerful God of the Israelites. (CSB)

Nebuchadnezzar clearly recognized (but did not describe) some feature that set this fourth person apart. (TLSB)

**3:26** *door.* Front opening. (TLSB)

*Most High God* – Finally, we should note how Nebuchadnezzar addresses the men when he calls them out of the furnace. They are “servants of the Most High God” (3:26). Nebuchadnezzar is forced to acknowledge indirectly that they serve God first and that they were right in placing God's commands (especially the First Commandment) above his demands. Moreover, his description of Yahweh, the God of Israel, as “the Most High God” is a way of referring to God that both the Judeans and the pagan Nebuchadnezzar can accept. Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges this God as above all other gods, even though he himself has not become a monotheist. At the same time, the Judeans can agree with the title and understand it to mean that the one true and triune God is Most High because all other gods are nothing. (CC)

Term non-Israelites used when referring to the true God (cf Nu 24:16; Is 14:14). (TLSB)

**3:27** Babylonian officials witnessed this miracle. (TLSB)

*not singed ... no smell of fire.* As the Lord had promised: “When you walk through fire you shall not be burned” (Is 43:2). (TLSB)

**3:28** He who had blasphemed the true God by setting up a golden image now praised Him. The arrogant king was humbled. (TLSB)

*blessed be the God* – Nebuchadnezzar is now forced to recognize God's supremacy. He can no longer maintain that he is an absolute monarch, with power above that of any god (see the commentary on 3:15). Nebuchadnezzar's acclamation of praise confesses that God did two things. First, he “sent his angel” (מַלְאָכָא מִלְּפָנֵי הוֹי). Note that earlier Nebuchadnezzar described this angel's appearance as “like a son of gods” (3:25). There is no contradiction here, since the Aramaic מַלְאָכָא, like the Hebrew מַלְאָכָא, normally means “angel, messenger” (see the second textual note on 3:28). In Nebuchadnezzar's pagan worldview, a god can be a messenger (e.g., the Babylonian Girru, similar to the Roman god Mercury or the Greek god Hermes). (CC)

Neither is there a contradiction between Nebuchadnezzar's description here and the likelihood that the person he saw was the pre-incarnate Christ. There are, of course, many accounts in the OT of angels sent by God as his messengers. However, in some passages, God sends a particular Angel or Messenger, often called “the Angel of Yahweh” (מַלְאָכָא יְהוָה), who is revealed to be divine, a hypostasis or person of the



Godhead, or even Yahweh himself. Especially since this Angel often displays human characteristics, we can, in light of the fuller revelation of the Trinity in the NT, infer that this divine Angel or Messenger who appeared in the OT is the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. This inference is consistent with the testimony of Jesus himself, who declared to his Jewish hearers, “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” Then after being asked, “Have you seen Abraham?” Jesus declared, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:56–58 ESV (CC))

*delivered his servants* – The second divine accomplishment that Nebuchadnezzar recognizes in his praise is that God “saved his servants who trusted in him” (3:28). By using the same verb, *נִצַּח*, “to save,” that he used in 3:15 when he had taunted the Judeans, “Then what god will save you from my hand?” here the king admits that he was wrong. There is a God who is able to save his people from the most powerful ruler and even from death, and he is none other than the God of Israel. As in 3:26, where the king called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego “servants of the Most High God,” here he calls them “his servants.” He thereby acknowledges that they have a higher loyalty than to him. They are first of all God’s servants, and God made this plain by rescuing them. (CC)

Nebuchadnezzar esp marvels at their willingness to face martyrdom for their faith, a theme that begins with Israel’s oppression in exile and appears throughout later Jewish and Christian literature. Israel as a nation suffered oppression from their enemies, but they increasingly suffered as individuals in hostile lands. Cf Heb 11. (TLSB)

*trusted in him* - The third indication of the miraculous is the observation of a fourth person in the fire. Nebuchadnezzar immediately recognizes him as looking like “a son of gods” (3:25). The Aramaic unmistakably quotes the words of Nebuchadnezzar as true to his pagan view. In the larger context, Nebuchadnezzar had constructed a statue that represented his “gods” (3:12, 14, 18), and he required his subjects to worship it, so he lacked faith in the one true and triune God, nor was he even a monotheist. Thus it would be wrong for us to expect Nebuchadnezzar to describe the identity of the fourth person in language consistent with biblical theology and the full revelation of God the Son in the NT. (CC)

*set aside...yielded up their bodies* – First, Nebuchadnezzar concedes that the faithful Judeans “changed the king’s command” (3:28b). They refused to obey his order to break the First Commandment and participate in idolatry, and as a result of their rescue by the one true God, the king will abrogate his prior command (3:4–6) and replace it with a prohibition against blaspheming their God (3:29). (CC)

The second act of faith by the Judeans is that “they gave their bodies so that they would not reverence or worship any god except their God” (3:28b). They faced certain death because they refused to engage in idolatry, and in that way they offered their bodies to God. This was a good work because they did so in faith and love for God. Perhaps with them in mind as positive examples of faith, St. Paul declared negatively, “If I give over my body so that I am burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:3; cf. Phil 1:20). All Christians are called to offer their bodies as “a living sacrifice” to the one true God (Rom 12:1; cf. Mk 12:33; 1 Cor 6:15–20; Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16). (CC)

**3:29-30** After his praise of God (3:28), Nebuchadnezzar undertakes two actions. Some believe that his praise and actions show that Nebuchadnezzar was brought to saving faith in the one true God. However, the text does not include any personal expression by Nebuchadnezzar of repentance (contrition over his sin), nor any confession of personal faith in the one true God or trust in him for salvation. The miracle has, in effect, reprimanded the king for persecuting the Judeans for their refusal to participate in idolatry, and he has been impressed by God’s power to save his servants who trust in him (3:28), but Nebuchadnezzar gives no indication that he himself trusts in God or desires to serve him exclusively. Instead, it would seem that Nebuchadnezzar merely considers the God of Israel to be a powerful god who could be added to the pantheon of gods revered by the Babylonians—a god whom they should not

offend, but not a god whom they should worship and trust to the exclusion of all other gods as required by the First Commandment. (CC)

Thus Nebuchadnezzar has been brought under the Law partially, but the effects here fall in the category of the first use of the Law: as a curb against sinful actions. Nebuchadnezzar ceases to require idolatrous worship of his statue and stops persecuting the Judeans. His subsequent command (3:29) also intends to prevent blasphemy against God. However, the king does not repent of his sins as offenses against the only true God; such repentance would have been the result of the second and most important use of the Law. (CC)

Nebuchadnezzar gives no evidence of the God-given righteousness that comes only through faith in the one true God, which is the only righteousness that avails before God. Instead, he is brought to a measure of civil righteousness: law-abiding, respectful, and even reverent conduct in the realm of human relationships. Although civil righteousness is not sufficient to render the sinner forgiven and righteous before God, it is good for society, as Nebuchadnezzar implicitly affirms by his decree commanding respect for the Judeans' God. He does not want his people to speak against and so anger this God who has shown such power. His decree threatens the same punishments he held over the wise men in 2:5 when they could not tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream or its interpretation. (CC)

Nebuchadnezzar does not command his people to worship Israel's God, nor does he prohibit them from continuing to worship their other gods. Yet his order does prohibit his people from blaspheming this God, and so it would also command a measure of respect for those Judeans in captivity who worship only their God. This order should prevent malicious accusations (see 3:8) and persecutions against faithful worshipers. (CC)

Finally, we are told that Nebuchadnezzar "promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon" (3:30). This chapter ends where it began, with a focus on provincial officials (3:2–3). Clearly, Daniel the author is demonstrating the virtue of worshiping only the true God. The pagans who automatically bowed to the gold image worshiped gods who were not alive and could not deliver them. The Judeans, however, worshiped the only living God. They prospered because only their God is able to save (cf. Acts 4:12). (CC)

However, we should not draw the conclusion that loyalty and faithfulness to God always bring deliverance and prosperity in this life. Certainly, these three Judeans did not assume that God would save them from persecution and physical death ("but if not . . ." 3:18). Their theology is the same as the theology of the cross in the NT: followers of Christ crucified cannot expect to be treated any better than was their Lord (cf. Mt 10:14–25; Acts 14:22; Rev 11:7–8). God may or may not choose to give his people promotion and prosperity in this life, but his certain promise is his gift of eternal life and glory far beyond anything this world can offer (Dan 12:2–3). Because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego focused on eternal life and were able to see that life in this world is not worth anything in comparison to the eternal life God promises to his people, they defied the king at the risk of their lives in the fiery furnace. Thus by faith they "extinguished the power of fire" (Heb 11:34). (CC)

Nebuchadnezzar made the faith of Judah a legal religion with rights of toleration and respect. This was an important event since many Judeans would remain in Babylon after the end of the exile in 538 BC (e.g., the Judean community described in Esther). (TLSB)

**3:30** *promoted*. Gave them additional responsibilities and privileges. (TLSB)

**3:8–30** The three youths who did not obey the idolatrous king's command were delivered because God's angel protected them. You have God's promise that "He will command His angels concerning you to

guard you in all your ways” (Ps 91:11). You can be sure that His angels are watching over you at all times. • Heavenly Father, I entrust my life into Your loving hands, knowing that You care for me always. Amen. (TLSB)