

Daniel 3:1-12. *Religious Iconology Amuck*. So, the King makes a large sculpture,⁶ some 90 feet high & 9 feet wide, covered with gold. He puts it out front for all to see in an area called Dura. Summoning all the mucky mucks, from mayors to judges, he told them to come to its dedication. As good citizens they arrived. They were there standing when a loud speaker blared:

You are commanded, every person of all nations and language—When you hear the music, you must fall prostrate and worship this gold image the King has set up. If you do not and worship immediately, you'll be thrown into a blazing furnace.

Sure enough when the music started, including a zithers, harps and pipes,⁷ they did as they were told. The Chaldeans, however, noticed **Yahweh believers were not "hearing the music."**

O King, live forever. You've given orders to worship the gold image; those who don't, will need an ER burn unit. But there are some Jews, even some you've given government jobs in Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who have ignored you, O King. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image you set up.

DANIEL 3:1-12

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

⁴Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: ⁵As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

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

⁸At this time some astrologers [or *Chaldeans*] came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹²But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." [See Exodus 20:3-5]

- Q Why would a king create such a sculptural phenomenon? Political opportunity? Self-serving? Was the king "spiritual?"
- Q Why didn't Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego comply? Where was Daniel? Why were they singled out? Surely there were more believers following Exodus 20:3-5 than these three...
- Q What are some of today's sculptures for which prostrated worship is expected? Consequences of non compliance? Modern parallels today? Arc, ballrooms, red hats, frog costumes?

⁶The image probably represented the Babylonian/Assyrian god Nabu, whose name formed the first element in Nebuchadnezzar's name. After Marduk, Nabu was the most important god of the Babylonians and became so popular he was adopted by the Assyrians and known as the son of their god Ashur. Even after the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612BC, Nabu—unlike many of the other Assyrian gods—continued to be worshiped until at least the 2nd century CE.

⁷The words for "zither," "harp" and "pipes" are the only Greek loanwords in Daniel (this passage is still in Aramaic). Greek musicians and instruments were mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions written *before* the time of Nebuchadnezzar

Daniel 3:13-23. Nebuchadnezzar's collar warms. With no rage to spare, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were summoned. The King was not happy...

Is it true Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that you do not serve my gods or worship this gold sculpture I have set up? When you hear the music and are ready to worship the sculpture, I made good. But, if not—katie bar the door—you'll be thrown into a blazing furnace. And what god will rescue you from my authority?

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not exactly compliant. We do not need a defense attorney in this matter—if we're thrown into the furnace, the God we serve is able to save us—He will rescue us from your authority, O King. But, if the God we serve does not rescue us, we want you to know, O King, that we will not serve your gods or worship this gold sculpture.

The King was even less happy. His attitude changed and he ordered the furnace to be heated seven times more than normal. Some strong soldiers tied up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and threw them in the furnace, robes, trousers, turbans and all. The fire was so hot that it killed the soldiers who tossed them into the furnace.

- Q Why did Nebuchadnezzar give Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego a chance to recant?
- Q What was their rationale for choosing not to defend themselves before the sovereign authority which they served in Babylon? Just how did they refuse to comply?
- Q Why were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego tied up? With all their clothes? The furnace heated seven times hotter than normal?
- Q How does the Lord God protect those who choose today to ignore the gold sculptures of our time?

DANIEL 3:13-23

Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?

¹⁵Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. [See Hebrews 11:34] ¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²²The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

Daniel 3:24-30. *Nebuchadnezzar's Come to Jesus Meeting*. As Nebuchadnezzar watched, he became puzzled—I thought there were three men thrown in there. I see four! They're walking around—neither tied up nor harmed. The fourth man looks like “a son of the gods.”

He approached the entrance of the furnace and shouted—“Come out, come here, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God.”

This time Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego obeyed—they came out. As all the government mucky mucks gathered around, they noted no hair was singed, no robes were scorched, no turbans tweaked, nor trousers burnt. They didn't even smell like fire.

Nebuchadnezzar was impressed:

“Praise for the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who has sent His angel to rescue His servants. They trusted Him, defied my commands, and were willing to give up their lives, rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

Ergo, I proclaim a law that no one of any nation or language can say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. If they do, they will be cut into pieces, their houses turned into rubble—No other god can save in this way.”

Then Nebuchadnezzar **promoted** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Sweet grapes?

Q Why did the Lord God put Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego through such a scare, such a test of their loyalty? Did He not know the outcome? (See Genesis 22:12; “Now I know...”)

Q To what extent was Nebuchadnezzar a believer in the Lord God Yahweh?

Q How long did his protection order last? What function did it serve the Lord God Almighty?

Q What did you learn from a fresh re-reading of this commonly told story?

DANIEL 3:24-30

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

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

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

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

28Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

30Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.