

STUDY ON THE LIFE OF DANIEL

***“Standing For God’s Glory”***

Daniel 3:1-12

**STUDY (7)**



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8 January 2012

## “STANDING FOR GOD’S GLORY” – A Study of the Life of Daniel

### (Daniel 3:1-12)

This chapter contains one of the great stories of the Bible. Children are enthralled by it from their earliest days and it never fails to refresh the heart of the saints of God. It has been and will continue to be an oasis of encouragement to God’s faithful remnant, who refuse to bow the knee to the gods of this world. It tells of how three young men of God defied the wishes of the most powerful man on the planet rather than compromise their testimony. The king will discover in his empire that there are at least three young men who would not bow, bend or burn! The poet put it well,

I saw the martyr at the stake, the flames could not his courage shake, nor death his soul appall. I asked him whence his strength was given, he looked triumphantly to heaven and answered, “Christ is all.”

When we left Nebuchadnezzar he had just acknowledged Jehovah, “*of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings.*” (2:47) But in this chapter this acknowledgement will not be practiced. His initial humbling at this revelation is temporary, as his pride is now uplifted at his own greatness. The king is not alone in this for man is a fickle and inconsistent creature at heart. These truths are no less true today than 2,600 years ago.

*Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.*

Although it is not explicitly stated, there seems to be a definite connection between the statue of chapter 2 and this image here. The king was told that he was the head of gold (2:38), but the rest of the image would be from different metals. He was made aware that this meant that his kingdom was finite and limited. This image of gold seems to be a defiant gesture to God’s revelation. It was Nebuchadnezzar’s will for the future.

Man must bow before the will or defy the will of God. Nebuchadnezzar was told that God is in absolute control of his future, “*and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure*” (2:45). But the greatest monarch on the face of the earth is not yet willing to acknowledge the sovereignty of God over history. By this statue he is defiantly saying, “I will reign forever.” The proud king still believed that he controlled his destiny and his nation’s future. He wanted his legacy to endure forever. Not content to be the “head” of gold, he wanted the whole body!

Nor is Nebuchadnezzar willing to surrender his life to this stone representing Christ. Every man must allow his life to be changed by this stone or it will destroy him, “*And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder*” (Matthew 21:44). Man is intuitively a spiritual creature. However, once a man refuses to acknowledge the reality of his Creator, Romans 1 tells us that he turns to idolatry. As part of that decline, such a one “*became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened*” (Romans 1:21). This invariably leads to self-worship, “*changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator*” (Romans 1:25). MacArthur points out,

It is characteristic of man to create a god like himself and then become more and more like that god. This way he accommodates his sinfulness. You see, the difficulty with worshiping the true God is you have to face the reality of your inadequacy and your

sinfulness. So if you reject that you invent a god who is a lot like you and it's a lot easier to live with that kind of a god.

This image is no insignificant statue as it was around 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. So, it was like a large obelisk. Likely, it was overlaid with gold, as to construct of pure gold would have been prohibitively expensive. Notwithstanding, it would still be a very costly obelisk.

The word "*plain of Dura*" indicates a flat plain between mountains, where any statue would be visible from quite a distance. As such, it would create a spectacular and awesome sight when the sunlight radiated. Clearly, this visual effect was meant to convey the greatness and grandeur of Nebuchadnezzar. A man of Nebuchadnezzar's intelligence knew exactly what he was doing in erecting such a monument to self. He wanted the glory for himself for the empire's growth. In the next chapter we get an insight to his thinking, "*Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?*" (4:30)

*Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. (v2-3)*

Those who were called were the "Who's Who" of the Empire. The fact that Nebuchadnezzar called all his leaders indicates that he wanted to make a significant statement to all of them about who ruled their lives. This list would have been a vast crowd of people. It would also be an impressive and intimidating sight reflecting the power of their monarch and their relative insignificance. It would be an attempt to unite the empire in loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar with a mixture of religious devotion and fear. It was not enough to be respected as a great leader; he wanted to be worshipped as divine. Had things gone according to his strategy, this would have been a powerfully symbolic and spectacular ceremony.

*Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, That at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. (v4-6)*

This was no mere political gathering but an act of corporate devotion and worship of the cult of Nebuchadnezzar. The music was to create the right mood for people's devotion and the furnace was near to frighten any fence sitters into compliance. The order was unambiguous and threatening. In short "Bow or Burn!" No one was permitted the right to express disagreement according to their own conscience. To the polytheists and the opportunists this was not an onerous command. It required them to set aside their private reservations in order to go with the crowd and to preserve their livelihood. This desire to live for this world when external pressure is applied is an intuitive reaction of the ungodly. The devil recognises this frailty in fallen man, "*Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life*" (Job 2:4).

God extends grace here to Nebuchadnezzar for his blasphemy by not smiting him with worms like Herod in Acts 12! It should also be noted the importance of music in affecting the emotions of these worshippers. Music has its own moral language and carries a clear message. The secular world is certainly cognisant that certain genres of music communicate a certain

moral message as they invest billions in composing music for concerts, movies, and advertisements. Music in such contexts is arranged with a deliberate agenda to move people in a specific way. Music can evoke joy, sobriety, profanity, pity, love, admiration, patriotism, sorrow, lust, and awe. The devil has always had his music to carry the message of rebellion against God's word. His music has never been as popular as it is today. It even dominates most of what passes for worship in Christendom, as Lucifer is leading the choir and the "worship" band! Warren Wiersbe rightly observes,

Nebuchadnezzar was wise to use instrumental music because it could stir the people's emotions and make it easy for him to manipulate them and win their submission and obedience. Throughout history, music and song have played an important role in strengthening nationalism, motivating conquest, and inspiring people to act. Music has the power so to grip human thoughts and emotions that people are transformed from being free agents into becoming mere puppets. The English poet William Congreve wrote that "music has charms to soothe a savage breast," but music also has power to release the savage in the breast. Music can be used as a wonderful tool and treasure from the Lord or as a destructive weapon from Satan.

*Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. (v7)*

The command immediately brings these people into a conflict between the word of God and the word of the king. There was almost total and immediate obedience to Nebuchadnezzar's edict. The natural man has more fear of the fires of Nebuchadnezzar than the fires of hell. That is why they immediately fell down and worshipped the image. They conveniently set aside any reservations in order to advance their careers in Babylon. Such people invariably capitulate and compromise. As moral relativists and pragmatists, they simply do whatever they have to do.

However, there is always a faithful remnant who reject the dictum, "When in Babylon, do as the Babylonians do." These people live by faith and not by fear. These young men were prepared to swim against the prevailing tide, even if it cost them their lives. They follow the counsel of the Master, "fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). They knew that Nebuchadnezzar was raised up by God (2:37), but that did not make him God! Compromise was not part of their vocabulary.

## **POTENTIAL EXCUSES**

The devil will always provide excuses for sin. They could have rationalized their obedience to the king's commandment by a number of excuses:

- (1) We are in Babylon so we must respect their culture and laws. God has placed us here so we must submit to the lawful authorities He has put us under. To defy the king would be a negative example and misunderstood as a treasonable act whereas we must be positive role models. It is just their cultural way of showing their respect of their king, who has been good to us.
- (2) God will understand that we were forced to do this. He knows that we are His true followers on the inside.
- (3) We can bow down with our knees but in our hearts we remain standing up.

(4) There is no need to be so narrow-minded. After all it is just a metallic pole. Didn't Moses set up a pole for Israel to worship? They are not asking us to embrace their idols. Also, it is just one time so we can let it go this once.

(5) Everyone else is doing this and we cannot afford to be different. God has placed us here to be an inspiration for our nation so there is no need to be rash and jeopardize this beneficial influence. There are many young Jews who look up to us and see their future tied up in us. We can extend our godly influence in other ways.

(6) In such a vast crowd no one would notice us bowing so it will not affect our testimony.

(7) God is a God of love and He would not want us to be burned to death in such a manner. He gave us these great natural talents not to be wasted in such a pointless gesture.

### **REMNANT RESPONSE**

Despite the available excuses, these young men refuse to compromise. The irresistible force of the Emperor of Babylon has met three immovable objects, who could testify with the Psalmist, "*My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed*" (Psalm 57:7). They would not cede an inch of ground that would dishonour their God's great name in Babylon. Once again, the true remnant prove that you can be in Babylon but not of Babylon!

We can only but imagine the courage and faith required to stand upright when so many were prostrate around them. But these young men proved that despite their advancement in 2:49, their promotion had not turned their heads or their hearts. They could discern this was a confrontation between Jehovah and the gods of Babylon. Their faith was not intimidated by the threat of the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar was not their Lord! They trusted God and honoured His word over that of any mere man. Once God had spoken on the matter (Exodus 20:3-5), this settled it in their minds. They would do right and simply leave the consequences to a sovereign God, even if it meant losing everything. This was the habitual practice of their lives since young (cf. 1:12-13).

Few believers think through theologically a creed for their conduct like these three young men. Because of not having a fixed heart, they are blown around by trying circumstances. They find the external pressure irresistible. When the Nebuchadnezzars of this world roar they fall down. They do not love the Lord their God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. The threats and example of their peers is too much for them to stand firm when the crunch comes. As a result they tragically conform to the values and worship of the gods of this age.

*Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews. They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever. Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. (v8-12)*

The devil has his people in every society dedicated to destroy the people of God. No doubt the rapid promotion of these three Jewish youths over the indigenous Chaldeans provoked jealousy. Doubtless, these Chaldean enemies of these young men were eagerly watching for such an opportunity to remove these rivals. The original language is graphic here as

the word translated “*accused*” means “to devour” or “tear to pieces.” It is a vivid idiom for violent slander.

These accusers begin with flattery, “*O king, live for ever.*” They then rehearse the king’s commandment before setting forth the nature of their accusation with language calculated to inflame the volatile monarch. They begin this by emphasizing the racial roots as foreigners of these rebels, “*There are certain Jems*” before naming them so that there is no doubt who exactly they are talking about. The 3 accusations are a mixture of truth and falsehood cleverly woven together, “*these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*” This could be broken down:

- (1) Disrespect for the king, “*these men, O king, have not regarded thee*” – this was false.
- (2) Refusal to serve Babylonian gods, “*they serve not thy gods*” – this was true.
- (3) A refusal to worship the golden image, “*nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up*” – this was also true.

The stage has been set. These three Hebrews have raised the standard of the Cross and must now face the consequences. The next element of this trial that a sovereign God has permitted will now follow. It should not be overlooked the stand they took in chapter one along with Daniel. The faith and courage they exhibited there only increased and strengthened their faith for future tests, as Satan’s onslaughts are continual. Faithfulness to God does not guarantee freedom from suffering and tribulation (cf. 2 Timothy 3:12). These Hebrews proved from young that external pressure does not have to overcome internal principles. Previously, Daniel was with them but now God is going to allow them to go through this test alone. Derek Thomas notes,

God uses trials and tribulation to produce even more significant fruit in the lives of His people. Listen to what Calvin says, “The church of Christ has been so constituted from the beginning that death has been the way to life and that the way of the cross is the path to victory.” That has been shown to be the case with Daniel and his friends. Trial after trial they meet. Does it lead them to despondency and doubt? No. It does just what God intended it to do. It produces men of superb Christian character who believe in God and who are ready to be inflexibly faithful to Him in the face of the stoutest persecution.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does being a Christian mean that you will never experience sufferings and trials?

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2. Describe ways the world tries to get us to conform to its standards and values.

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3. How willing are you to take your stand for every part of God's Word at home or at work?

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4. How have you been challenged by this incident?

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