Daniel 3

The Fiery Furnace: But Even If He Does Not

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION

"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

When the whole world bows, three young men stand — trusting God's power, surrendering to His will, and refusing to worship anything else. They don't escape the fire, but they meet the Son of God in it, and they walk out without even the smell of smoke.

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

00 The Text

DANIEL 3 (KJV), MARKED

Gold God — His character & actions | Green Command / instruction | Sky Key repeated word
Rose Sin / warning | Violet Promise / blessing | Amber Time / place / contrast

1 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.

2 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.

3 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.

4 Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,

5 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:

6 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

7 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.

8 Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews.

9 They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever.

10 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:

11 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, that he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

12 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.

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.

14 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp , sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye ⇄ fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a ⇄ burning fiery furnace; and ⚠ who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter.

17 If it be so, ▲ our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the ⇄ burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one ◷ seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in 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 coats, their hosen , and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the ⇄ burning fiery furnace.

22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the ⇄ burning fiery furnace.

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonied, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

25 He answered and said, Lo, I see ★ four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and ▲ the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the ⇄ burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of ▲ the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies ★ the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, ★ nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that ★ trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and 🙏 yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

29 Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is ▲ no other God that can deliver after this sort.

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

Marked in the text

- **v1** ⚠ an image of gold
- **v1** ◷ the plain of Dura
- **v5** ⇄ fall down and worship *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ⇄ burning fiery furnace *(every occurrence)*
- **v6** ◷ the same hour
- **v12** ▮▮ they serve not thy gods
- **v15** ⚠ who is that God that shall deliver you
- **v17** ▲ our God whom we serve is able to deliver us
- **v18** ▮▮ But if not
- **v19** ◷ seven times more
- **v25** ★ four men loose
- **v25** ▲ the form of the fourth is like the Son of God
- **v26** ▲ the most high God
- **v27** ★ the fire had no power
- **v27** ★ nor the smell of fire
- **v28** ★ trusted in him
- **v28** ▮▮ yielded their bodies
- **v29** ▲ no other God that can deliver

Marks are drawn on the KJV text. KJV "burning fiery furnace" is the NASB95's "furnace of blazing fire"; "But if not" (v18) is "But even if He does not"; "like the Son of God" (v25) is "like a son of the gods."

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · DANIEL 3:16–18 (KJV)

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be so, ▲ our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the ⇄ burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. 18 ▮▮ But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

Setting

In chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar heard that he was the head of gold — and that his kingdom would pass. Now "Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon" (v1). Not just a golden head this time, but gold from head to foot. Daniel is not mentioned in the chapter.

Structure

- vv1–7 — **the image and the decree:** every official in the empire is summoned to the dedication (vv2–3). A herald: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language" (v4). When the music plays, fall down and worship (v5). "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire" (v6). The music plays and everyone bows (v7).
- vv8–12 — **the accusation:** certain Chaldeans "brought charges against the Jews" (v8). They remind the king of his decree and name names: "These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (v12).

- vv13–18 — **the confrontation:** "Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego" (v13). He offers a second chance — and a challenge: "what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" (v15). Their answer: "we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it 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 even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (vv16–18).
- vv19–25 — **the furnace:** "Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered" (v19). He orders the furnace heated "seven times more than it was usually heated" (v19). His strongest soldiers tie them up in their clothes and throw them in (vv20–21); the flames kill the soldiers (v22). The three fall in, bound (v23). The king jumps up: "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" (v24). "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" (v25).
- vv26–30 — **out of the fire:** "come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" (v26). The officials see that "the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them" (v27). The king: "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him" (v28). A new decree protects their God, "inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (v29). The king causes them to prosper (v30).

Repeated words

the image / golden image (vv1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18); set up (vv1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 14, 18); fall down and worship (vv5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15); serve (vv12, 14, 17, 18, 28); furnace of blazing fire (vv6, 11, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23, 26); deliver (vv15, 17, 28, 29); the music list (vv5, 7, 10, 15); Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego (throughout); peoples, nations and men of every language (vv4, 7; compare v29).

Contrasts

all the people fall down (v7) ⟷ three men stand. "What god is there who can deliver you?" (v15) ⟷ "our God … is able to deliver us" (v17). Three bound men thrown in (v23) ⟷ four men loosed, walking (v25). The fire kills the soldiers outside (v22) ⟷ doesn't singe a hair inside (v27). The king's decree to bow (v5) ⟷ the king's decree to honor their God (v29). The king's word (v28) ⟷ their trust in God, "violating the king's command" (v28).

Chapter theme (my words)

When the whole world bows, three young men stand — trusting God's power, surrendering to His will, and refusing to worship anything else. They don't escape the fire, but they meet the Son of God in it, and they walk out without even the smell of smoke.

02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · DANIEL 3:24–25 (KJV)

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonied, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. 25 He answered and said, Lo, I see ★ four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and ▲ the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

The image (vv1–7)

Sixty cubits by six — about 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. Guzik suggests it was probably wood overlaid with gold, maybe set on a pedestal. It looks like Nebuchadnezzar's answer to chapter 2: if his kingdom was only the head of gold, he would build a statue that was gold all the way down. The dedication was a test of loyalty: everyone who mattered in the empire, bowing together on cue. Guzik draws the line to every regime that fuses national loyalty with worship. The number six runs through it — sixty cubits, six wide — and many see a foreshadowing of the final image the beast's followers must worship (Rev 13:14–15, 18).

The music

The list of instruments appears four times (vv5, 7, 10, 15). Critics claim three of the names are Greek words, so the book must be late. Guzik answers that Greek mercenaries and traders were in the Near East long before Daniel — loanwords for instruments travel with musicians. The music is the signal and the pressure: worship made easy, emotional and unanimous.

The accusation (vv8–12)

"Certain Chaldeans" — the same class of wise men whose lives Daniel saved in chapter 2. Envy of the Jewish officials is part of it. The three didn't stage a protest; they simply didn't bow, and they knew they'd be seen. Spurgeon, in Guzik: "You will not be able to go through life without being discovered: a lighted candle cannot be hid."

"Who is the god who can deliver you?" (vv13–15)

The king gives them a second chance — the same pressure, again. His question puts himself above every god. Guzik: Nebuchadnezzar talks about gods, but lives as if he himself is the final power.

"But even if He does not" (vv16–18)

"We do not need to give you an answer" isn't rudeness; it means "we don't need to argue our case — our minds are made up." Their answer has three parts:

- **God is able** — faith in His power (Eph 3:20).
- **He will deliver us out of your hand** — one way or another; even death would put them beyond the king's reach.

- **But even if He does not** — surrender to His will (Job 13:15).

Guzik lists the excuses they could have used: everyone's doing it; it's only once; we'll bow on the outside but not in our hearts; we can do more good alive; God will forgive. They used none. Their small faithfulness in chapter 1 — the food — had prepared them for this big test (Luke 16:10).

Seven times hotter (vv19–23)

The king's face changes — the same man who fell on his face before Daniel in 2:46. Anger makes him foolish: a hotter fire doesn't kill faster, and it kills his own men. The three are thrown in bound, fully clothed — every detail emphasizes there is no escape.

The fourth man (vv24–25)

The king sees four men, loosed, walking. The KJV says "like the Son of God"; the NASB "like a son of the gods" — a pagan king's way of saying a divine being. In v28 the king calls him God's "angel." Guzik, with many interpreters, sees a preincarnate appearance of the Son of God — the Angel of the LORD who appears throughout the Old Testament (Gen 16:7–13; Exod 3:2–6; Judg 13:18–22). God didn't keep them out of the fire; He met them in it (Isa 43:2). The only thing the fire burned was the ropes. Guzik notes the Greek Septuagint adds a long song the three sang in the furnace (not in the Hebrew/Aramaic Bible) — and compares Paul and Silas singing in prison (Acts 16:25).

Not even the smell of smoke (vv26–27)

The king calls them "servants of the Most High God." The officials — the same crowd that bowed in v7 — inspect them: not a hair, not a thread, not even the smell. God's deliverance is complete.

The king's confession (vv28–30)

"Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego" — still *their* God, not his. Guzik notes how much the king now knows about God — He sends His angel, He delivers, He's worthy of trust — and still doesn't know Him personally. His decree protects God's reputation by threatening violence, which shows how far he still has to go (chapter 4). But he has seen men who "yielded up their bodies" rather than worship any other god — a living sermon (Rom 12:1).

A prophetic picture

Guzik also sees the chapter as a picture of the end: a world ruler demanding worship of an image (Rev 13:14–15), a faithful remnant preserved through the fire, and Daniel — absent from the scene — as a picture of those spared that hour (Rev 3:10).

Word study (Aramaic)

- **image — *tselem* (H6755):** an image, idol — the same word as the statue in 2:31.
- **cubit — *ʾammah* (H521):** a cubit, about 18 inches.
- **set up — *qum* (H6966):** to raise, establish.
- **worship — *segid* (H5457):** to bow down, prostrate oneself in homage.
- **fall down — *nephal* (H5308):** to fall, fall prostrate.
- **furnace — *ʾattun* (H861):** a furnace, kiln.
- **blazing — *yeqad* (H3345):** to burn, blaze.

- **brought charges — *ʾakal qarets* (H399 + H7170):** literally "ate the pieces of" — slandered, informed against.
- **serve — *pelach* (H6399):** to serve, worship, pay reverence.
- **able — *yekil* (H3202):** to be able, have power.
- **deliver — *shezib* (H7804):** to rescue, set free.
- **wrath — *chema* (H2528):** heat, fury.
- **loosed — *sherah* (H8271):** to untie, loosen, set free.
- **without harm — *chabal* (H2257):** hurt, injury — "there is no injury in them."
- **angel — *malʾak* (H4398):** a messenger, angel.
- **trust — *rechats* (H7365):** to trust, rely on.

Cross-references

Exod 20:3–5; Deut 4:23–24; Josh 24:15; 1 Kgs 18:21; Job 13:15; Ps 66:10–12; Isa 43:1–3; Isa 48:10; Dan 6:10, 22; Matt 10:28, 32–33; Luke 16:10; John 16:33; Acts 4:19–20; Acts 5:29; Acts 16:25; Rom 12:1–2; 1 Cor 10:14; Heb 11:33–34; 1 Pet 1:6–7; 1 Pet 4:12–13; Rev 2:10; Rev 13:11–18.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · DANIEL 3:27–28 (KJV)

27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies ★ the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, ★ nor the smell of fire had passed on them. 28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that ★ trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and ❝ yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Command to obey — "we are not going to serve your gods."

When everybody bowed, they stood. The pressure to bow today rarely comes with a furnace; it comes with music, crowds and "it's no big deal." I'll name the golden image I'm most tempted to bow to — approval, comfort, money, a substance, a screen — and decide now that I won't bow. For the men I disciple, standing may mean being the only one in the dorm, the cell block or the job site who won't go along.

Sin to confess — bowing on the outside

"I'll bow but not mean it" is still bowing. Where have I gone along outwardly to avoid trouble — laughed at what I shouldn't, kept quiet when I should've spoken? I'll confess it and ask for the courage to be seen (Matt 10:32–33).

Warning to heed — the furnace is real

Faithfulness doesn't guarantee escape. They were thrown in. Some faithful believers die in the fire (Heb 11:35–38; Rev 2:10). If my faith depends on God always keeping me out of trouble, it won't survive the first furnace. Their faith was in God Himself, not in a particular outcome.

Promise to trust — "four men loosed."

God didn't keep them out of the fire; He walked with them in it. "When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched" (Isa 43:2). For the man facing a sentence, a diagnosis, a divorce or a relapse: you are not in the furnace alone. And the fire may burn nothing but the ropes that held you.

Example to follow — "But even if He does not."

This is mature faith: God is able, I trust He will, and if He doesn't, I still won't bow. I want to pray that way — boldly asking, fully surrendered. "...not My will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

Worship

The Son of God walks in the fire with His people. He doesn't send a rescue note from outside; He steps in. That's what He did at the cross — He went into the fire for me. "There is no other god who is able to deliver in this way" (v29).

Prayer

Most High God, You are able. Give me the courage of these three young men — to stand when everyone bows, to trust You in the fire, and to say "even if You do not" and mean it. Walk with me in every furnace, burn off whatever binds me, and let my life show that there is no other god who delivers like You. Amen.

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