

NEBUCHADNEZZAR MAKES A GOLDEN IMAGE TO BE WORSHIPED

DANIEL 3:1-7

SCRIPTURE READING AND INSIGHTS

Begin by reading Daniel 3:1-7 in your favorite Bible. As you read, ask God to help you understand His Word (Psalm 119:73).

In yesterday's reading, Daniel revealed the dream and its meaning to Nebuchadnezzar. In today's lesson, Nebuchadnezzar constructs a golden image to be worshiped by all the people in his kingdom. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

Daniel 3:1

Image of gold (3:1): Having been identified as the head of gold in the image in his dream (Daniel 2:38), Nebuchadnezzar in his megalomania erected a full golden image of himself—gold from head to toe—to put an exclamation point on his greatness. Some Bible expositors suggest that Nebuchadnezzar may have also been trying to bring greater unity to his kingdom by affirming his authority as king and by centralizing worship. As we will see shortly, there were many varying ranks of government officials in Babylon, but this image portrays Nebuchadnezzar as the one who is over all. No one else in the kingdom would have such an image.

The image was ninety feet high but only nine feet wide. If the image were in the form of a human being, this ten-to-one ratio would make him appear to be very skinny. (The ratio of a normal human being is more like five to one.) It may be that the image pictured a more normal-looking human figure elevated on some type of massive base that made him appear high and exalted.

The construction of this golden image shows Nebuchadnezzar's true colors. Recall from Daniel 2:47 that following Daniel's revelation of the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Nebuchadnezzar had exulted to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings." Apparently, his high thoughts of Daniel's God were short-lived, for he now had only high thoughts of himself.

In any event, because of its height and the gold appearance, the image was no doubt an imposing symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's majesty and authority. Because it was to be worshiped, it is properly categorized as an idol. (See Major Themes.)

Plain of Dura (3:1): "Dura" comes from an Akkadian word meaning "walled," "walled area," or "walled enclosure." Therefore, the plain of Dura may have been a plain surrounded either by walls or perhaps by mountains or hills. Archeologists have uncovered a site that may be where the golden image stood, but there is no certainty on this as of yet.

Daniel 3:2-3

Satrap (3:2): These were the chief representatives of the king over specific regions. Note that the seven positions listed in verse 2 are apparently in descending rank.

Prefects (3:2): These were military chiefs or commanders of armies.

Governors (3:2): These were the civil administrators, lieutenants, or viceroys.

Counselors (3:2): These were legal experts or lawyers. They may have assisted the king in the formation of new laws. Or they may have been counselors to those in various levels of governmental authority.

Treasurers (3:2): These were in charge of Babylon's treasure houses and administered the funds of the kingdom.

Justices (3:2): These were the government's arbiters and administrators of the law.

Magistrates (3:2): These were judges who passed judgment in keeping with the law.

And all the officials (3:2): These were all other types of civil leaders in Babylon.

The dedication of the image (3:2): All seven classes of government officials would be required to bow in worship of the image to show their full and unqualified allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. Note that Daniel would not have been present with this group because he remained in the capital city “at the king’s court” (Daniel 2:49). Daniel’s three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were called to Dura to show their loyalty. As we will see, they refused to bow down, just as Daniel would have refused had he been there.

They stood before the image (3:3): In obedience to Nebuchadnezzar, the seven classes of government officials all showed up for the dedication and demonstrated their respect by standing before the image. They were required to bow down and worship the image, so it had both religious and political significance. Bowing to the image acknowledged not only acceptance of Nebuchadnezzar’s divine status, but also submission to his political power and authority. This would unify the kingdom religiously and politically.

Daniel 3:4-5

The herald proclaimed (3:4): Heralds publicly announced the king’s decrees on various matters. In the present case, the heralds indicated to all seven classes of government officials that by their act of bowing before the image, they would recognize Nebuchadnezzar’s political and religious power and authority. Bowing would be an open act of submission.

When you hear (3:5): Music was used for a variety of purposes in biblical times (see Major Themes). In the present case, music was a cue to bow down and worship the golden image.

Horn (3:5): There were various kinds of horns in biblical days. The *geren* was a form of trumpet, made from the horn of an animal (see Leviticus 25:9; Joshua 6:4). A trumpet made from a ram’s horn was called a *shofar* and was used for special occasions during the Jewish year, particularly on the Hebrew New Year’s Day and the Day of Atonement. The horn used in Babylon was no doubt something similar.

Pipe (3:5): The pipe was a wind instrument. An example of this type of instrument was the *halil*, which was basically a hollow pipe made of cane or wood that utilized a reed to make a musical sound.

Lyre (3:5): The lyre was a stringed instrument with a wooden frame (see Genesis 4:21; 2 Samuel 6:5; 1 Kings 10:12). David, the shepherd king of Israel, was apparently able to play both the lyre and the harp and often used such musical instruments to soothe the nerves of King Saul (1 Samuel 16:16, 23).

Trigon (3:5): This was a small harp with smaller strings and higher tones.

Harp (3:5): Similar to the lyre, the harp was a musical instrument made from a wooden frame that had strings on it. Again, David was a gifted harpist, with the ability to play several different kinds of harps (see 1 Samuel 16:18-23). David was also a proficient poet, as evidenced in the psalms he wrote, many of which were accompanied by music. He was known as the "sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1).

Bagpipe (3:5): Unlike the modern bagpipe, Babylon's bagpipe was apparently some type of percussion instrument.

Fall down and worship (3:5): The sound of the music would be the cue to worship the idolatrous image. (See Major Themes.)

Daniel 3:6-7

Whoever does not fall down and worship...a burning fiery furnace (3:6): The penalty for refusing to bow down and worship the image was incineration in what was apparently an industrial-sized oven used for smelting metals and baking bricks. This was a punishment Nebuchadnezzar had elsewhere used on two Judean false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab (Jeremiah 29:22). The Code of Hammurabi (sections 25, 110, and 157) indicates that this may have been a common Babylonian means of execution.

As soon as all the peoples heard (3:7): An awesome and formidable image stood before the people. The king had given the command. Now the music started. On cue, all the government officials showed their submission by bowing before the image in worship. Nebuchadnezzar thereby achieved what he wanted—an open display of leaders vowing political and religious submission.

PARALLELS

Daniel 3:7—Many worship idols.

Revelation 13:4—Satan and the antichrist are worshiped.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *The making of idols.* Daniel had told Nebuchadnezzar that the head of gold in his dream represented him (Daniel 2:38). It must have gone to his head! Now the king had a 90-foot-high gold image of himself constructed—not just a head, but apparently the entire body—to reflect his greatness, glory, and self-proclaimed deity. This image was likely not made of solid gold but rather featured a gold overlay, similar to other objects discovered in the ruins of Babylon (see Isaiah 40:19). An image that large made of solid gold would have been entirely too difficult to handle because of its incredible weight. Regardless of how glorious it appeared, Daniel's friends refused to bow down and worship it. The New Testament consistently urges Christians to avoid all forms of idolatry (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5; 1 John 5:21). (More on this in the next lesson.)
2. *Musical instruments in biblical times.* Music was used for a variety of purposes in Bible times. Music was played for the homecoming party of the prodigal son (Luke 15:25). It was also used at banquets and feasts (Isaiah 5:12; 24:8-9) as well as for laments (Matthew 9:23). Music was performed at the coronation of kings (2 Chronicles 23:11-13) as well as at temple ceremonies (1 Chronicles 16:4-6; 2 Chronicles 29:25). Music was often performed during pilgrimages (2 Samuel 6:5). Sometimes music was used to enable a prophet to enter into a trance so he could receive divine oracles (see 2 Kings 3:15). Music was also used to celebrate military victories (Exodus 15:1; 2 Chronicles 20:27-28). In the present case, music was used as a signal to bow down and worship a pagan idol (Daniel 3:10).

DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

Execution by burning—Genesis 38:24-25; Leviticus 20:14; 21:9; Daniel 3:6, 21

Idolatrous images of gold—Exodus 20:23; 32:2-4; Deuteronomy 7:25; 1 Kings 12:28; Psalms 115:4-8; 135:15; Isaiah 2:20; 30:22

LIFE LESSONS

1. *Worship is reserved for the one true God.* Worship involves reverencing God, adoring Him, praising Him, venerating Him, and paying homage to Him, not only externally (with words, songs, and rituals) but also in our hearts (Isaiah 29:13; see also 1 Samuel 15:22-23). The Hebrew word for worship, *shaha*, means “to bow down” or “to prostrate oneself” (see Genesis 22:5; 42:6). Likewise, the New Testament word for worship, *proskuneo*, means “to prostrate oneself” (see Matthew 2:2, 8, 11). In Old English, “worship” was rendered “worthship,” pointing to the worthiness of the object that was worshiped. Such worship is the proper response of a creature to the divine Creator (Psalm 95:6). Worship can be congregational (1 Corinthians 11-14) or individual (see Romans 12:1). Worship does not stop on earth but continues in heaven when believers enter into glory (see Revelation 4-5). Some have said that true worship is the missing jewel in the modern church. Let’s resolve to recover that jewel!
2. *False objects of faith.* It has been well said that everybody has faith in something. Even members of cults and false religions can have a strong faith, but their faith is misdirected to a false object of faith. The people commanded to bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image had no hesitation in doing so, not only because they were accustomed to worshipping pagan gods but also because of the death penalty for refusing. Daniel’s friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were present at this ceremony. They had faith in the one true God, and their faith was unwavering in the face of persecution and even the threat of death (compare Psalm 118:8; Proverbs 3:5; Jeremiah 17:7; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Peter 1:7). In the next chapter, we will see that their faith in God and their faithfulness to God landed them in a fiery furnace (Daniel 3:20-21).

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Daniel and his friends did not obey the command to worship the golden image. Do you think peaceful civil disobedience is ever justified? If so, under what circumstances? (See Acts 5:29.)
2. Can you say without hesitation that God is your foremost object of faith? Are you sometimes tempted to trust other things in place of Him?
3. Why might music have been used in this worship ceremony? In what ways can music affect people?