

## Mid Week• Daniel 3

### INTRODUCTION

Tonight's study takes us into the well-known story of Daniel's three friends in the fiery furnace.

This is a story virtually every kid who's attended Sunday School is familiar with.

It's a favorite of those who write Sunday School curriculum and those who make cartoons of Biblical stories.

I see this story as a classic hero's tale!

It has all the elements that make for the best kind of drama and carries a moral message that is one of the best.

That it really happened and is more than just good literature makes it all the better.

You know, we need more stories like this in modern literature.

We need more literature that gives the Biblical world-view in a manner that both *fires* the imagination to boldly love God and *steels* the heart against cowardice.

There were a few men at Oxford in England earlier this century who taught English literature.

As they watched the century progress and the ideas of modernity take over the culture, they grew fearful of the creeping paganism they saw all around then in Europe and at Oxford.

The old English myths and legends that had embodied the virtues of nobility and goodness were being swept away by crass materialism.

So they banded together and decided to write *new* stories to capture the imagination and reinforce the virtues, may I say, the distinctly *Christian* virtues that have so well served the Western world and brought it into the modern age.

They called themselves the Inklings; JRR Tolkien, CS Lewis, and Charles Williams.

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Ring* books were the result of this endeavor as were CS Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*.

In many ways, Lewis and Tolkien were taking the same virtues portrayed in this story in Daniel 3, and recasting them in another setting.

Again, what makes this story all the more appealing is that it isn't fiction – it really happened, just as we read it here.

### TEXT

**<sup>1</sup>Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.**

Right off the bat we're struck with something odd.

If we had read this chapter right after studying chapter 2, we'd see a *connection*.

What had Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about in chapter 2? An *image*.

And what was it made of?

Head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay.

What did this image represent according to Daniel?

Earthly kingdoms – one following another until the end when Christ comes to rule and end mere human rule of earth.

But what do we find here? An image all of gold!

What is Nebuchadnezzar saying?

“My kingdom will never end!”

“I’m not just a head of gold to be followed by some lesser kingdom of silver!”

“I’m it – I’m the best and no one will supplant me!”

This image was calculated to impress!

Standing at 60 cubits, or 90 feet high and some 9 feet wide, and made of gold, it certainly would do that!

There’s a bit of a debate about what this image was made to look like.

At 90 ft. high by 9 ft. wide it’s proportions aren’t right to be a figure exactly representing a man.

But we do have sufficient evidence from this time to know that these kinds of large statues weren’t proportionally correct.

They were made to *impress* – and the added height to width of this image would do that.

Because of the way this chapter seems linked to chapter 2 and the image

Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream, it’s reasonable to assume this was an image cast in human form.

It might have been a likeness of Nebuchadnezzar, or more likely, it was of one of the Babylonians gods.

It’s size wasn’t at all out of the ordinary for these kinds of colossal images either.

Several statues that have been discovered were 60 feet tall and the Colossus of Rhodes was some 105 ft. tall!

As for it’s being made of gold – this isn’t at all hard to fathom when we realize that the way these kinds of things were made was to overlay a wood core with gold plates.

This wasn’t solid gold – if it was Daniel would have mentioned this because it was so unusual to make something like this of solid gold.

Daniel says that Nebuchadnezzar had this image set up on the plain of Dura.

He has something in mind for it’s use and as we’ll see, he wanted a wide open expanse around it so we can conclude this plain was the one located about 6 miles SE of the city of Babylon where there is a large mound of brick still there that would have served as a perfect platform upon which to erect this image.

What's interesting is that apart from this brick platform there is nothing else in the area – almost as though this mound was constructed just to put something on and gather people around, but not to stay.

Imagine what this image would have looked like from a distance when the sun reflected off its gold surface, like a massive amber mirror.

**<sup>2</sup>And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>3</sup>So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.**

Considering the extent of the Babylonian empire, this summons was probably sent out as soon as the craftsmen who were working on the image gave a completion date for it.

It was the king's plan to gather all the many officials, both high and low, of his entire kingdom, and stage a massive religious and political meeting.

It was a way to strengthen his hold on the far-flung reaches of his empire and to ensure he had the complete loyalty of all those who were representing him.

The list of officials given here speaks of virtually every level of government, from the highest members of the royal family to the lowliest court-appointed lawyer. The list speaks of *civil* officials, judges, treasurers, and even *military* commanders.

This list gives us an important insight into the administration of government in the ancient world.

It's easy for us to think of these ancient times as being very backward and unsophisticated.

We have a certain measure of cultural elitism and smugness that thinks everything older than a hundred years was old-fashioned, inept, and horribly inefficient.

Most people would be totally blown away if they could be transported back to the Babylonian, Persian, Greek or Roman periods to see the complexity and sophistication of their systems.

In fact, most of our basic societal forms were developed by these civilizations and have only been modified over time.

This list of officials paints a picture of a complex and elaborate government that controlled the economy, the justice system and the military.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make sure every branch of it was loyal to him.

So he gathers them all, and then poses them a test calculated to weed out the disloyal while at the same time reinforcing in the minds of any who might be wavering an impression of his awesome power.

**<sup>4</sup>Then a herald cried aloud: “To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup>that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; <sup>6</sup>and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”**

There’s the test – when you hear the music – bow and worship the image.

If you don’t worship – you’ll fry.

These options are the king’s way of claiming the absolute superiority of his gods over all others.

And if this image was made to be a likeness of himself, then he was claiming to be the *embodiment* of the deities of Babylon.

The reason the penalty for failing to worship was so harsh was because it would be seen as treason against the kingdom and blasphemy against the gods of Babylon.

Now, in light of chapter 2 and what Nebuchadnezzar says there about Daniel’s God, this is interesting.

Look at v. 47

**The king answered Daniel, and said, “Truly your God *is* the God of gods, the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret.”**

At *that* point, Nebuchadnezzar was ready to acknowledge the God of Israel’s *superiority* over other gods, including the gods of Babylon who had proven themselves *impotent* through the failure of the wise men of the kingdom.

Now, Nebuchadnezzar seems to have had a change of mind and has reverted to his old trust in the deities of his homeland.

For that reason, many scholars believe that there’s about a 20 year gap in time between chapter 2 and chapter 3.

And what’s happened to change Nebuchadnezzar’s mind about the superiority of Israel’s God is the defeat of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

Remember, as we’ve already seen, the ancients believed military victory proved one god’s superiority to another and no defeat was more decisive and conclusive than the destruction of a god’s primary temple.

So Nebuchadnezzar moves from deep respect for Israel’s God to the euphoric feeling that he and his gods are *greater* than Yahweh.

Why not erect an image and reinforce his power throughout his kingdom?

There’s a very good chance some of the gold used in the image was taken as loot from the temple in Jerusalem.

**<sup>7</sup>So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.**

Like the list of officials earlier, this list of musical instruments is meant to give the picture of a full orchestra – in other words, this was a big-scale production.

This was a full State event – on the scale of the half-time show at the Super Bowl or the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympic Games.

The music begins, and as per the order – everyone bowed in worship before the

image – all that is except 3 Jewish men.

**<sup>8</sup>Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. <sup>9</sup>They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup>You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; <sup>11</sup>and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup>There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.”**

When Daniel was promoted at the end of chapter 2 because of his ability to tell and interpret, he asked Nebuchadnezzar for permission to appoint his own assistants in the administration of the central province of Babylon.

Daniel’s first choices to fill the roles chief administrators were his three Jewish buddies, Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-Nego.

But these 4 men were *foreigners* – despised Jews at that - and didn’t fit the *profile* of the kind of people who served in such high positions in Babylon.

The Chaldeans, those magicians and astrologers who formed the king’s inner circle of counsel, grew jealous and looked for a way to bring them into disfavor with the king.

You can just picture them now;

When the music started, they fell on their faces in the proper posture of worship, but they were looking around to see who was still standing – hoping of course that Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-Nego would hold fast to their confessed devotion to their God and so defy the king’s order.

Sure enough, there the three stood – and the Chaldeans pointed them out to one another; winking and smiling at each other – for now they had something with which to accuse them.

At the first chance they went running to Nebuchadnezzar.

They remind the king of his order that all worship or be burned.

Then they accuse the 3 Jewish men, pointing out that they are foreigners, and that Nebuchadnezzar had given them important positions of influence in the most important province of all – right there in Babylon!

They level 3 damaging charges against them:

- 1) “These men, O king, have not paid due regard to you.”
- 2) “They do not serve your gods”
- 3) “Or worship the gold image which you have set up.”

They’ve defied you – They disregard your gods – They are fomenting rebellion  
They are treasonous, blasphemous rebels!

These are serious charges indeed.

But make no mistake – the Chaldeans are motivated by nothing more than political jealousy.

They are envious of their position and influence and still stinging from having been shown powerless some 20 years before when they were unable to tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream.

Will Nebuchadnezzar see through their envy?

Maybe – but it doesn't change the fact that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego failed to bow before his idol.

**13**Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king.

**14**Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, “*Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?* **15**Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, *good!* But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”

Calling them for a personal audience and giving them a second chance reveals that Nebuchadnezzar was indeed wise to impure motives of the Chaldeans.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had served faithfully in their capacity as administrators over Babylon so Nebuchadnezzar offers them a chance to prove their loyalty by giving them a second chance.

He knew these three men worshipped a God other than the deities of Babylon – that wasn't news to him.

But in his estimation, when it came to being placed in a furnace, no god was able to deliver – certainly not Yahweh – why He couldn't even save His own temple or deliver the people who belonged to Him.

If Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego wanted to make this a show-down between the gods of Babylon and the God of Israel, Nebuchadnezzar had every confidence his side would prevail – after all, how could anyone survive the furnace?

**16**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. **17**If that *is the case*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver *us* from your hand, O king. **18**But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

For Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego it wasn't a *showdown* and they had nothing to prove.

For them the issue was simple – the 10 Commandments prohibited them from bowing down and worshipping anyone other than Yahweh.

So they say – “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.”

“In other words, we're not going to plead our case or try to talk our way out of this.

We're not going to negotiate and we don't need a second chance.

Don't put 20 more seconds on the clock and give us time to think it over.

We're not going to bow to your idol!”

Now – they knew that their God *could* deliver them from *any* trial.

They had no doubt whatsoever in God's *ability* to deliver; they just didn't know if it was His *purpose* to deliver them in this instance.

So they say,

**Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us and He will deliver us from your hand. But if not, we still will not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.**

What Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego say here has been repeated by God's people thousands upon thousands of times throughout the centuries. History is filled with stories of miraculous deliverances from danger and imminent death.

And yet, the roles of the martyrs are filled by millions.

Why is it that sometimes the saints are delivered from the very midst of the furnace and at other times the noose tightens, the blade falls, or the bullet enters the head?

That is an answer that no one can give except God Himself.

Some He delivers miraculously, others die.

From our perspective, this is a mystery; from the perspective of eternity, all will be made crystal clear.

For Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego the issue was simple – regardless of the consequences, they weren't going to bow.

They had every confidence that even if they should be tossed into the flames they would be delivered.

But that confidence didn't end there – it saw through the furnace to God.

To them, there was something more important than *personal physical survival*.

That *something* was the survival of their spiritual selves, their integrity.

Nebuchadnezzar meant this whole scene with the image in the plain of Dura to be a loyalty test; loyalty to him.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego saw it as a test of their loyalty to God.

Here again, as earlier in chapter 1 and their refusal to eat the approved diet,

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego are faced with the task of walking the tight-rope of humble disobedience to man so they can be obedient to God.

Notice their demeanor – they are respectful and humble, not defiant and aggressive.

They quietly and simply tell the king that they are unable to comply with his command because it would be violating a higher law.

We see this same kind of humble disobedience in the Apostles in Acts 5 when they were brought before the Sanhedrin and told to stop preaching in the name of Jesus.

Peter humbly responded that they had to obey God rather than man.

The Apostles were then beaten and released, with another warning of worse things to come if they didn't stop.

They left, returned to the very site where they had at first been arrested, and carried on doing what they had done before.

Because we live in a fallen world, there will be times when the rules of man conflict with the will of God.

When that happens, we yield to the higher law of God while maintaining a

meek and quiet spirit in dealing with the heat we'll catch from man.

**19**Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

Daniel uses words here that paint an ugly picture.

Nebuchadnezzar was so outraged at Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego that everyone could see it on his face.

**He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. <sup>20</sup>And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup>Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.**

Rage usually turns reasonable people into highly unreasonable people.

Fury leads surely to folly, and such is the case here.

If Nebuchadnezzar wanted to torment Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, wouldn't he command that the fire be cooled?

Heating it up more is only going to make them die more quickly!

But he is in such a rage he isn't thinking clearly and orders it the furnace stoked as hot as it can get.

Archaeologists have discovered some execution furnaces from this area.

They are an adaptation of the lime-kilns that were used for producing lime.

They had a vertical shaft through which fuel and limestone would be dropped, and a large door in the side from which the processed lime would be scooped out after the fire had cooled.

This kiln arrangement was modified so that it could be used for executing criminals.

They would be dropped down the shaft into the flames.

Nebuchadnezzar commands that the 3 be bound by soldiers whose strength would ensure no escape.

Now, normally prisoners were stripped of their clothing prior to execution.

Clothes were pricey, and the clothing these three would have been wearing as government officials would have been rich indeed.

But Nebuchadnezzar is in such a hurry, he orders them to be bound while still dressed in their finery.

They're picked up and carried to the opening of the shaft . . .

**<sup>22</sup>Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. <sup>23</sup>And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.**

Heat rises, and as the soldiers carry the 3 Jewish men to their fate, the radiant heat of the furnace which they couldn't see with their eyes was so great it had super heated the air and roasted their lungs.

They died, but Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were dropped into the shaft



and down they went into the flames.

Nebuchadnezzar had taken up a position to watch the executions.

He could see through the doorway of the furnace and as the bodies of the 3 Jews dropped into the white hot flames he no doubt felt a sense of power and satisfaction.

This is what happens to those who oppose my god-like power!  
But he was in for a surprise . . .

**24**Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste *and* spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?”

They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.”

**25**“Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

Get this scene.

He is looking though the open doorway, he see the bound forms of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego drop from the shaft into the flames, there’s a pause, then he sees them stand to their feet, free of their bonds, and walking around as if enjoying the beach on Maui.

Then he rubs his eyes because he thinks he might be seeing double – there’s four in the fire.

And the fourth has the countenance and bearing of deity itself!

The white hot flames of Nebuchadnezzar’s fire seem like mere shadows in the light of the glory radiating from the face of this fourth member of the firewalkers.

With great urgency he calls for all his Chaldean buddies to LOOK!

Who was this who walked with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego in the midst of the flames?

Jesus – the Son of God.

This is called by theologians a *theophany*, an appearance of God in the OT.

And it is a direct fulfillment of something God had promised in Isaiah 43:1-2

**1** But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You are Mine.

**2** When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego may have had this very passage in mind as they heard the music play and were faced the choice of bowing or frying.

It’s this promise that may have steeled them when they stood before the king and expressed their confidence in God’s deliverance.

**26**Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace *and* spoke, saying, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come *here*.” Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. **27**And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king’s

**counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.**

When it was obvious to Nebuchadnezzar that the fire would do them no harm, he called for them to come out.

And in his estimation they have gone from being treasonous, blasphemous rebels to servants of the Most High God.

What God? The God Who is the MOST HIGH – the HIGHEST God.

Nebuchadnezzar is not denying the existence of his gods, he is simply acknowledging again the superiority of Yahweh.

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego exited the furnace, all the officials gathered round to marvel at this miracle.

There was no evidence of fire – no hairs singed, no smell of smoke.

The only difference was that the ropes tied so tightly around them by the strongest soldiers were gone, burned through by the flames.

**<sup>28</sup>Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God! <sup>29</sup>Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this.”**

The more we read about Nebuchadnezzar the more we find him to be an interesting guy.

We’ll see that especially next week in chapter 4.

This was a man who sat at the absolute pinnacle of earthly power and whose word was ironclad law.

He was a brilliant military leader and skilled ruler of his empire.

But as bright as he was, he seems to have a bit of a problem with being *impetuous*.

We see that here in his sudden anger at Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego for refusing to bow.

“Quick – bind them, heat the furnace, throw them in.”

His haste ends up killing some of his best soldiers!

Then, again – “Look, there are four men in the fire and they are unhurt.”

Then – “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, come here, now!”

Then he says – “Anyone who insults their God gets it!”

Nebuchadnezzar appears to be a classic example of one of the kinds of soil we read about in the parable of the Sower in Matthew 13.

As the farmer sowed his seed, some of it fell on soil that also had weed seeds in it.

The good plants and the weeds grew up together, but eventually the weeds choked out the good plants.

Jesus said this pictured those who heard the Word of God and seemed to come to faith, but the cares of the world became a distraction that ended up

choking out the work of the Spirit.  
Nebuchadnezzar seems to be that kind of person.  
Twice now he has been confronted with the power and truth of God.  
Twice he responds in seeming faith.  
But as we read on, into chapter 4 we discover that he still isn't a genuine believer.  
That'll come, but later, after some severe testing.

There are many people who have great stories about the old days with God.  
They were there in the tent in Costa Mesa – they were a part of the original Jesus People movement.  
They were baptized by Pastor Chuck down at Corona del Mar.  
They used to go to the concerts with Love Song and Mustard See Faith and Gentle Faith.  
They remember Daniel Amos and were even members of a campus bible study in high school or college.  
They remember when Christians didn't applaud, they just saluted. (One Way finger)  
They look back on those days with a sense of fondness, but they consider themselves to have been naïve then and sophisticated now.  
They gave religion a try in their youth but now they're members of the "real world."  
Things are more complicated now and there's just no time for church, for the bible, for God.  
After all, the weekends are made for skiing and fishing and washing and waxing the car.

Probably all of us here tonight know someone like that.  
When confronted by the power and truth of God, there's definite interest.  
But there's no follow through, no development of a relationship with God that goes beyond just being amazed by His goodness and power.  
They find themselves easily distracted by the cares and things of this world.  
And since the world is an ever-present reality that presses on them, they find themselves moving its way.

What Nebuchadnezzar ought to have done was ask Daniel to teach him about Yahweh.  
The kind of faith Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had isn't built by witnessing an occasional miracle.  
It's developed by knowing God – and knowing God only comes through His word and Spirit.  
We can only grow above the cares of this world and find victory over their distractions when we invest time in growing in our knowledge of God.

**<sup>30</sup>Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.**

The plot of the Chaldeans backfired.

They thought Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego would fry and their positions would be open.

The opposite happened - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were promoted, and knowing Nebuchadnezzar, it was the Chaldeans who had accused them who probably ended up in trouble.

Once again we see how the enemy works to destroy the people of God but God only turns it around and uses it against the devil.

It is such a comfort to know that every maneuver, every strategy and tactic the enemy uses, only serves to tighten the noose around his own neck.

## CONCLUSION

Someone has been missing from this story – who?

Daniel!

Where was he?

It's possible he was on some mission for the king and had an exemption from attending this conclave on the plain of Dura.

The point is, Daniel's absence is noticeable; he's never even mentioned!

Some bible teachers have used this as an analogy of the last days and the Tribulation.

They say that Daniel, who is called the "Greatly Beloved of the Lord" 3 times, is a type of the Church, the Bride of Christ.

When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who are a picture of Israel during the Great Tribulation, are faced with bowing or passing through the fire, Daniel isn't even on the scene.

They say this pictures the Rapture or removal of the Church *prior* to the Tribulation.

Nebuchadnezzar pictures the Antichrist who demands worship or death.

When Israel refuses, his fury is unleashed against her, but she flees to a place of refuge till the end of the Tribulation as is prophesied in Zechariah.

This is certainly no *proof* of a pre-tribulation rapture, but it does provide another interesting evidence in that direction.

Chances are, are we live in this world, hostile as it is to God and to our faith in Him, while we may not stand before an angry despot, faced with bowing before a golden image are being thrown into a fiery furnace, there is yet some challenge to demonstrate our loyalty to Jesus.

Maybe it's at work or at school or maybe in your own home.

And there's pressure there – bow or suffer.

Stand my friend!

And know that as you do, Jesus is right by your side to sustain and strengthen you no matter what happens.