

Study in Daniel - Part 3

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[0 : 00] Seeking the Lord's blessing, we'll turn to the chapter we read, Daniel chapter 3, and verse 25.

Daniel chapter 3 at verse 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. 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.

Now, just a few weeks ago, we saw how Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were taken out of Judea into captivity in Babylon, while they were still very young men. And we saw how they stood for God and for the faith of their fathers in the midst of the pagan culture of Babylon. And they took that stand before the king.

[1 : 22] And the king rewarded them in God's mysterious way by promoting them, so that they served in government in Babylon, in the king's service. And we saw in the second chapter how Daniel was further raised by God to a higher position, because he interpreted the dream which Nebuchadnezzar saw, when he saw a large statue being smashed by a small stone, and that stone itself growing to fill the whole earth.

Daniel explained and expounded that vision to him as the Lord gave him understanding of it. And the result of that was that Daniel was raised to be the ruler of the actual province of Babylon itself. The Babylonian Empire across the world was split up into several provinces. And, of course, the central province would be around the city of Babylon itself. And Daniel was made ruler over that. And all the time, God is raising his people and preparing them for a great work. Because right in the midst of the captivity, God is getting them ready for a great exodus, which will return in triumph to God's own promised land.

And we should always remember that, that when God puts his people through a fire, it is to teach them in the fire, that he might bring them out of the fire, and be better out of it than they were before they went in it.

[2 : 50] And that's what Daniel and his three friends were here for in this situation. Now, his three friends are brought into this position, where they are persuaded, or they are brought by Nebuchadnezzar, to stand in front of an idolatrous image.

Now, it all revolves around this particular image that Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And this probably took place around 18 years after the events of chapter 1.

So they have become somewhat older than they were then. Nebuchadnezzar made, we're told in verse 1, an image of gold. Now, that would probably mean that the image was gold plated.

For example, the golden altar that was in the tabernacle was called, repeatedly a golden altar, in spite of the fact that it was made of wood, and actually plated with gold.

And several small statues have been found by archaeologists in Babylon and the surrounding regions, which are small wooden statues, statues plated with gold.

[4 : 00] And probably that was the way this image was too. Now, it was a remarkable size. It was 90 feet high, and it was 9 feet broad. And it probably stood on a pedestal of some kind.

And that height makes it nearly as big as one of the ancient wonders of the world, the Colossus of Rhodes. So it was a remarkable statue that Nebuchadnezzar erected, and it was an image.

It was designed to be worshipped. Now, at the dedication of this image, Nebuchadnezzar called together All these princes, governors, captains, judges, treasurers, counsellors, sheriffs, and rulers.

Now, that indicates just how well organized this particular empire was. All these officials had their particular functions according to their grade, so that the whole system of rule right across the empire was carefully constructed by Nebuchadnezzar with himself at the head of it.

But all rulers were brought together, and they were brought together for a particular reason. Civil, military, judicial, all gathered. And that was to fall down before this golden image, to worship it, and to do service to it.

[5 : 23] Now, it may be that the image was actually an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. I don't know, and we're not told. Possibly, it was. Because one reason, or the major reason Nebuchadnezzar would have for doing this, would be to ensure that the whole empire was obedient to himself.

I think I mentioned, when I was looking at the first chapter, that it was Nebuchadnezzar's custom to take some of the finest young men from different areas of his empire and train them, just as he did with Daniel and his friends, in order to be rulers.

But he had to make sure of their trust. And so in that way, he would command them to bow to an image, probably an image of his own. And with that act of worship, they would be indeed his own. Now, it may seem a very cruel, or a very harsh thing for Nebuchadnezzar to enforce that, but it's useful to remember that pagans have a strange or a different attitude to religion, because with a pagan, anything goes.

Nebuchadnezzar would be quite happy for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship their gods. But he would equally expect them to worship his, and that is the way that the pagan mind works.

[6 : 42] It is all the same, and there is no difference to be made. There is no one true God before whom we must fall. And so he didn't think that it was any problem for them all to bow down and to bow before an image of himself and to give worship to a creature rather than to the creator.

But, of course, that is how it comes to these men of God. What they are required to do is to put the creature in place of the great creator.

They are to bow down before him as God, and they are to yield to him the place that belongs to God himself.

And, of course, no true Christian can do that. No true Christian can do that. And when the Herald was to read the statement, and to give the word, the musicians would begin to play, and then they must all fall before this image.

Now, friends, we must not bow down before a graven image, whether it be a graven image of God or a graven image of some other who is not God.

[7 : 53] It is forbidden for us to fall down and to give our worship to any created thing or even to an image of the uncreated one. And the second commandment is equally explicit on both.

It is a sin to bow down before an image of God, even as it is to bow down before an image of bulls or of beasts or four-footed things. And they knew that, and it's an acid test.

And the Christian often will find himself in positions where the world will make him or try to make him give service to the creature that he should give to God.

And that was the position that these men were found in here. And of course, there were many things that would urge them just to do it. All the world's dignitaries were there, all the great rulers, and they were all there.

The burning, fiery furnace wasn't too far away. For all we know, it was probably within sight of the three of them. And then again, there is just the simple matter that the devil will have said, well, just go down anyway on your knees and bow down and touch the ground.

[9 : 02] No one needs to know what's in your heart. In your heart, you are worshipping the true God, but outwardly, you can just appear to worship the creature. But for the Lord's people, their outer appearance is as important as their inward.

And the Lord's people are as concerned for the outward as they are for the inward. It is the person that matters. And they will not give assent to Satan outwardly while claiming to give assent to God inwardly.

So when the music played, they stood. They went there, they were clothed, it appears from their clothing that they were dressed even with the hats and with everything for the suitability of the occasion.

But when the command came to bow before an image of a false god, they stood. And they stood in that way before their Lord.

Now the devil's agents were busy watching them because we're told in verse 8 that certain Chaldeans came near and they accused the Jews.

[10:13] And that word accused in the original language means to eat to pieces or even to tear to pieces. They looked around and they spotted immediately these three men and they reported them to Nebuchadnezzar.

And when he heard he was in a rage and in a fury, he commanded to send for them. He brought them to him and he asked them, is it true?

Have you done this? And they confessed that they had done it. But they also said this, We are not careful to answer thee. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace.

But if not, be it known to thee, we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up. Now that in itself is a remarkable response and it shows the depth of their faith.

They cleaved to God. And they loved God. They loved their God with all their heart and soul and mind and strength. And they would never give to a creature the worship that they were to give to him.

[11:28] And what they said essentially was this, Our God is greater than your burning fiery furnace. And he is greater than you. And if he desires, he will deliver us from this burning fiery furnace.

But if not, and if it's his choice or if it's his will to cast us into that burning fiery furnace, then so be it. We will not serve the creature.

We will not give glory to the creature that is to be given to the Lord alone. And in that way they showed themselves to be men of God rather than to be in the service of Satan.

And is that not what all the Lord's people are to have? As Job said, though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. Your faith in God must never depend upon how he handles you.

Your reliance upon God must never depend on what kind of situation you are put. Your faith and trust in God must go beyond that. It must go behind it.

[12:31] It must look to the faithfulness of God's promise. It must look to an ultimate deliverance, not to what you actually experience in this world. Job, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

And the word is so strong and so emphatic. It means, though he murder me, yet will I trust in him. And that was the depth of the faith of Job.

Now, sometimes the world will pressurize you. Maybe you will lose your job if you don't do such and such a thing. Or if you don't follow the worldly people in such and such a way, you won't get your rise, or you won't get your reward, or this will be done, or that will be done.

And all the time you must show the unbelieving world that your faith makes a difference, and that you will follow Christ, irrespective of what the world thinks.

And it's not not the great challenge constantly, Christian friend, before yourself and before myself, that we follow Christ through thick and thin. And sometimes in a trial, the devil would have you cast off your faith.

[13:44] And he came to Job like that. And he came to Job through his wife. And his wife said to him, cast off your faith, curse God, and die. Why on earth do you persist in still believing when you're destitute, you're sitting on an ash heap, and you're scratching your skin every day with hard pottery, because of your disease.

Curse God and die, she said. The last channel that Satan could use was even through his own kith and kin, the one that was left, his own wife. But Job says, shall we receive good from the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil also?

Is it okay for me to have been a Christian, he says, all the years of my life, when God gave me sons, and he gave me daughters, he gave me cattle, he gave me oxen, he gave me everything, and now, when life has broken all around me, am I now to renounce my God, the same God who gave me these things?

If the Lord gave, the Lord takes away, and blessed be the name of the Lord, and Job in that way was an immovable rock, he would still follow, he would still cleave to Christ, and he would still cleave to God, and that is the kind of faith that you must have.

In the last analysis, it's the only faith that will stand, and when Satan insinuates and whispers in your ear, just to shake off your profession, and away you go, you cleave to the one you once cleaved to.

[15:11] If it be his will to deliver you, so be it, and if it is his will to put you in the burning fiery furnace, yet so be it too, you stay in the hands of God.

But of course, for these three men, the die was cast, and we're told that Nebuchadnezzar went into a blind fury, so that the form of his visage was changed.

In other words, it was written all over his face. He exploded with his rage and with his anger. And the first thing he did was that he commanded the furnace to be heated seven times more than it used to be heated.

Now, furnaces were often used in Babylon and around it to bake bricks in, and sometimes for smelting.

Now, the furnace, from what can be gathered, looked perhaps a little like a railway tunnel. It was an enclosed space that was closed at one end, but open at the other end.

[16:20] And there was an entrance to it on the top, whether that was how the fuel was put in or whatever, there was an entrance in it at the top, so it looked like a raised tunnel that was closed at one end and open at the other.

So if you stood some distance away from the open end, you could see the burning flames inside. And Nebuchadnezzar commanded, and there was a system of ventilation too, in order to heat the furnace, and these furnaces could become very hot, sometimes up to a thousand degrees, because the intensity of the heat, he commanded this furnace to be heated seven times more than usual. Now we shouldn't understand that absolutely, literally. It's as though we would say, heat this up seven times more than it ever has. This furnace burned in its intensity and in its severity, hotter than it has ever ever been.

And then he turns and he commands that the men be bound up in their clothes, in their hats, in their garments, bound together, tied together in chains.

And he got the most powerful men in his army to do it. Now I don't know exactly why that should be so. Maybe Shadrach, Mishach, and Abednego were very strong men physically, maybe that was the case, but he certainly chose the most able men in his army to carry out this task.

[17:51] And he commanded them to lead Shadrach, Mishach, and Abednego out of his presence and into the burning, fiery furnace. And the furnace was so hot, we're told, that when these men were casting the three men in, the fire belched out and killed themselves.

Now, if you go back to the picture that I gave you of the furnace, if you conceive the sheer heat that this furnace had been, got up to, and then the opening of the entrance at the top, it is easily seen how the flames or the smoke could belch out in such a way that these men who accompanied them or who cast them in were overcome by the flames and by the smoke and they were themselves destroyed by the fire.

And the fire which he appointed to destroy the people of God only destroyed his own. And that's a picture of Satan at the end of the day. Satan rages a fire against you as a Christian and he rages fire and he's breathed fire against the church for years and years.

In the last analysis he is only destroying his own. It is his own kingdom that he will destroy, his own kingdom that he will bring to nothing because the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church and Christ's kingdom will ultimately triumph.

So these three men are dropped down into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. And it is Nebuchadnezzar and his friends tasked then to sit and to watch this burning fiery furnace.

[19:34] They're able to watch from the entrance at one end as they see the raging fire inside that furnace. But then after a while the expression on Nebuchadnezzar's face changes and it changes completely from one of rage and anger to one of amazement and wonder.

After a while he sees movement, he sees shadows, he sees appearances, he sees three and then four images inside that fire, walking around and they become more and more clear to him to the point where he discerns that they're loose, they're not even bound, they're not enchained.

And he turns and asks the questions, did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? He answered and said, true, O king. 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.

Four men loose, not hurt, and the fourth is the son, or is like the son of God. Now I want to apply this to us as the Lord enables us.

It's your portion, if you are the Lord's, to be tried by fire. God has fire for you. At one time or another, he will give you fire.

[21:10] Peter says to the disciples that he was writing to, in 1st Peter, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.

It's not a strange thing at all, he says. For the Lord's people to be tried by fire is quite a normal thing. God appoints fire. Why? That the trial of your faith being much more precious than that of gold that perisheth might be found unto praise and honour at the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God appoints fire to cleanse us and to purify us. He puts us through trials and testings that we might improve and that we might advance and grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And every time God comes by fire, you know it. He'll rage with sickness perhaps in your body, maybe even sometimes a terminal disease. He might come in persecution.

The world raises its head and Satan will have his time with you. It may be through family trouble, domestic disharmony in one way or another, the thousands of countless ways in which providence can so come like a fire, threatening to consume you and to destroy you.

[22 : 36] No, whenever that happens, you will find three things true. First of all, you will have company. That's the first thing.

You will have company. Did we not cast three men into the fire? Lo, I see four men and one is like the son of God.

There is an extra man. man. And whenever the Lord's people are passing through a trial, there is an extra man. Who is the extra man?

Well, Nebuchadnezzar was more right than he knew. He said that the form of the fourth was like unto the son of God, or really like unto a son of the gods.

That is the way in which we should understand the expression. It is a bit too much like our interpretation of it. If you were going to take it literally, it is like a son of the gods.

[23 : 39] In other words, Nebuchadnezzar wasn't saying that the fourth man looked like Christ. He wasn't saying that. He was speaking out of the background of his own religion. They had their own glorious gods and they dressed them up in silver and dressed them up in gold and made them beautiful.

And he says, the fourth man that I see walking with those men there is like a son of the gods. He is different to the three. He is remarkably different.

There is something about him that marks him out as distinguished, supernatural, someone above this world, a member of the family of the gods.

That is how he appears to me. And how right Nebuchadnezzar was, how right he was, who is he?

Well, he is an angel.

But is it any angel? Is it a cherubim? Is it a member of the seraphim? Is it an archangel? No, it is the angel of God's presence. It is the angel of the covenant, the angel.

[24 : 44] This is the Christ, the second person of the Trinity, before he ever took human nature, taking a human form, and appearing in the midst of the burning, and in the midst of the fire, in order to be with his own people?

And is that not what God's word always promises us? When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

Isaiah. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. I'll look later on at what exactly that means.

But if you ask why, why are you saved from the flame? Why are you kept from the fire? Well, you're kept from the fire because God keeps you from it.

But does God keep you from it as someone remote and distant? Does he somehow engineer things in such a way that he remains remote from you, but nevertheless keeps the fire from you?

[25 : 52] No, that is never the way that you burn in the fire of God's appointment. Because the fact is that again according to Isaiah, in all their affliction, he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.

Now, aren't these marvelous words, Old Testament words, from Isaiah the prophet, in all their affliction, he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.

When you pass through the fire, he is in the fire with you. The Lord Jesus Christ is not detached, he's not remote, he's not without compassion, he's not without pity, he's not without a tender understanding of what you experience.

he is at God's right hand, yes, but he is also with you by his spirit in your situation, and he well knows himself what it's like to pass through a fire.

Was his whole life not a fire? Was it not a fire for him to be thrown out of the synagogue in Nazareth for preaching the gospel? Was it not a fire for him too, when he was so handled by the chief priests and the scribes and the Pharisees?

[27 : 14] Was it not a fire for him to see the rejection of men? Was it not a fire to be spat upon and to be hit, to be laughed upon, to be mocked by Roman soldiers, by Jews, when he came unto his own and his own received him not?

Fire, fire, he passed through fire, and when he's now passed into glory, he hasn't passed into glory as a man who's forgotten what fire was like.

I can pass through a trial and so can you, and for a year it lives with you, for two years perhaps it lives with you, but after the fifth year it's dimmed, after ten years or fifteen you almost forget what it was like, maybe after thirty you think it was nothing, but with the Lord Jesus Christ it's not so, he in his purity, in being without sin and without blemish, is as well aware today of what it meant for him to burn in the fire as it was then.

He is able to sympathize and to have compassion, and he has compassion with you when you enter into the fire and when you pass through it. In their affliction he was afflicted.

Isn't that a marvelous statement? Isn't it a marvelous statement? In their affliction he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them.

[28 : 47] Ah my friend, if you're in Christ, Christ is with you and whatever your trial may be, Christ is with you in it.

He is with you in it. You say, well I wish I could see him like these men saw him. I wish I could stand in my fire and see beside me the Lord Jesus Christ.

But let me ask you, on what evidence do you think they saw him? What makes you think Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego saw a fourth person with them in the fire?

Just because Nebuchad and Edsar saw it doesn't mean they saw it. You remember a time when Elisha was surrounded by the Syrian army and his servant was with him and his servant was so afraid.

And Elisha said, Lord open his eyes. And the servant's eyes were opened and he saw the angels of God encircling the army of Syria so that the army of Syria were surrounded by the invisible army of God.

[29 : 56] He saw it with his eyes. That vision was given to him of God's army. Did Elisha see it? I don't think so. Because he knew it was there by faith.

And when he knew it was there by faith he didn't need to see it. And God wants us to live by faith. He doesn't want us to live by sight. Because the glory of his power and majesty is shown by a life lived by faith not a life lived by sight.

Those men just believed that God would help them. And they believed that God was with them. They didn't need to see his presence walking amongst them. That was given to Nebuchadnezzar. Because I'll tell you friend God was working in Nebuchadnezzar. We'll come to that God willing next week. God was working in Nebuchadnezzar. And God showed him the reality that Christ was with his people.

And that's our reality tonight. That Christ is with you whether you see it or not. We're told of Moses that he went forward by faith.

[31 : 03] We're told in Hebrews that he endured seeing him who is invisible. I like that expression. It's a glorious expression.

He endured and he carried on because he saw the invisible. How? Just by faith.

He believed it to be there and it was there. God is with you in the fire. And how much we need to remember that.

So that's the first thing. When you pass through a fire you have company. And the second thing is this that whenever you pass through a fire you are being freed.

You are being loosened. Notice again in verse 25 Lo I see four men loose loose. In other words not only was this son of God loose but the actual others were loose too.

[32 : 09] The chains had melted. The burning fiery furnace heated seven times more than an ordinary fire or an ordinary furnace had melted the chains.

And that was the only thing it touched. Why? Because the chains were fashioned in Babylon and they had the stamp of Babylon on them and they were made by the king and they represented the powers of darkness and the power of evil.

The chains with which Satan binds his own people. The chains of sin and bondage to sin with which God's people were bound when they are cast into the fire those chains are broken off. In other words, God's fire only cleanses you from sin and it loosens you from the devil's hold. That's what the fire does when God appoints a fire for you. The only thing it touches is what binds you and what keeps you down.

[33 : 16] No friends, sometimes it doesn't feel like that. Sometimes you feel that the fire is eating into you. I don't know if these men felt the fire hot.

I don't know that. We're not told if they felt the heat. Even though they weren't burned, did they feel the heat? Maybe I'll leave that question with yourself. But certainly there are times when we feel we're being burned.

But let me tell you that in the trial the only thing burned is your chains. That's the only thing that will burn. And that's why he appoints a fire for us anyway.

You have things in your life that just need to go and I have things in mine. Pride needs dealing with, habits that we've formed, sins that have come in, that you had cut to the root but not uprooted, they've sprouted up, things have got a hold of you.

God has to put you through a fire and as I said so often recently, if he didn't have to, he wouldn't do it. But he puts us through a fire to loosen the chains.

[34 : 21] Did we not cast in three men bound? Well, I see four men loose. God loosened them. And we can say that it was the fourth person who loosed the chains of the others.

It was Christ present that made the chains or allowed the chains to burn away and kept the rest intact. God's trials are appointed for that.

And that's what Peter says. Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But it's that the trial of your faith, like the trial of gold, might be found like gold, purified.

Purified. That is what God is doing. He's cleansing you and the chains will melt away. But then thirdly, you'll notice it says too in verse 25, that they have no hurt.

Walking in the midst of the fire and they have no hurt. And Isaiah said the same thing when he said, when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

[35 : 36] And I think what that tells is this, that although the fire is real, it has no power over what really matters.

The fire that is sent into your providence cannot burn or consume the precious faith that God has given you. It will burn it to burn away the dross around it, but it cannot consume the faith itself.

In fact, it purifies and makes it shine all the more clearly. Sometimes God's people feel in certain situations that they're losing everything they've got.

And sometimes you feel well, all I had must have been wrong. How can this be happening? And how can I feel like this? And how can I have these questions?

And how can I have these feelings? And these experiences? And you feel you're losing your faith. But the only thing you're losing is what you can do without.

[36 : 38] That is your sin. You are not really being hurt at all. What is good in you is not being hurt. What is good in you is not being destroyed.

God is keeping his work. He's bringing forward his work. And when they were brought out of it, there wasn't even the smell of the trial upon them.

When they came out, the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor had the smell of the fire passed on them.

And you can imagine the utter amazement on the face of Nebuchadnezzar when he sees the Lord at work in such a way. And it's no wonder that he immediately promotes them and makes a decree that every people, nation and language, which speak anything 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 sword.

In other words, there was gold that day, all right, on the plain of Jura, but it wasn't on the statue, it was in the hearts of the men of God.

[37 : 59] And when that gold went into the fire, only the dross burned, and the gold itself did not burn. God has a fire for you, to make you better.

And how much we all need to remember that. We're prone to kick against it, to complain, and to ask that question that's always asked, why?

Why? Even why me? Well, there's an answer to that. You need it, that's it, and I need it with you.

And we therefore have to accept it as God's appointment for our good, to do good with it, to turn it into a prayer.

And when it's all over, we'll come out, every one of you will come out, without your head singed, or your coats changed, or the smell of the fire passing upon you.

Nebuchadnezzar was greatly impressed, but that was not enough to change him. A great change was going to come upon this king, and God willing will look upon it next time.

[39 : 07] May the Lord bless his word. Lord, our God, we pray that thou would give us grace to enter into a fire, and to withstand it.

Thou hast appointed a furnace for us all, and there are times when we must pass through it, and how good for those who have Christ with them in it, and how terrible for those who enter life's furnaces, without a savior at all, gradually consuming them, and gradually destroying them, until one day they are cast into the furnace of hell itself, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. And may we remember that all the fires of God's people are appointed in this world, but the fires of those who do not believe shall never stop.

Oh, help us therefore to enter into the rest of the Lord. For Christ's eater, Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[40 : 30] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.