

DANIEL 3

AIM OF STUDY:

Appreciate this story that is so well told while digging deeper to see how these men succeed where Israel failed.

MAIN TEACHING POINT:

We are called to commit to following Jesus as Lord before all other things. The three men are uncompromising in their commitment to have no other God's but YHWH and as such represent the faithful remnant of Israel.

INTRODUCTION

Here is a magnificent account of God's goodness and salvation. It has all the hallmarks of a rip roaring story: Heroes and villains, humour and pathos, tension and resolution. At times it looks like buffoonery, something that you might find in a vaudeville production where everything seems to be painted on a canvas larger than life. Considering the writer's art and wit in the telling of the story, which the reader/hearer is clearly meant to appreciate and enjoy, we should in no way minimise the suffering that God's people are undergoing.

Over the past weeks we've started to get to know king Nebuchadnezzar. Read through the whole of chapter 3.

1. What things about the king's personality and behaviour stand out from your reading of the chapter?

Let's now look at the dynamics and details of the story with a particular focus on the way that it is told:

A. The backdrop to the events of the story are set in place 3:1-7

We as readers are immediately drawn in for we know about Daniel and the 3 men. We know of their high status in Babylon and also know from chapter 1 of their uncompromising stance in not defiling themselves by eating the king's food.

2. Why are all the different names of the various officials named?
3. Why do you think that the writer repeats the names of all the different musical instruments and the actions that follow from their sounding? What effect does this repetition have on us as readers?

The mention of a burning fiery furnace early in the story casts a long shadow.

4. Why do you think that Nebuchadnezzar makes this threat? Is he anticipating some sort of push back from those over whom he rules?

B. Opportunistic intrigue 3:8-12

Right from the beginning of the chapter we are implicitly aware that there is a potential problem looming for Daniel and his three friends.

Now however, due to the intrigue of the Chaldeans things are coming to a head for the four Jewish youths. Notice again the repetition of the musical instruments and the threat of punishment for non-compliance with the king's order.

5. What precisely are the charges brought against them? Which of these are true?

Up until now there has been no mention of the Babylonian gods. The golden image has not been associated with the worship of any gods. It could be understood to be simply a matter of civic religion.

C. The face-off between the king and the 3 men 3:13-18

King Nebuchadnezzar now ups the ante. You can just imagine the delight of the Chaldeans who have brought the charges against the men as the king goes into a rage. Note again the repetition of the list of



of instruments and of the burning fiery furnace. (You can almost imagine as in a vaudeville show a sign being held up each time the burning fiery furnace is mentioned as the actors on the stage all tremble with fear while the audience boos!)

King Neb underlines the threat by adding one significant line that serves to shift the focus of the story. *And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?* (verse 15b). From this moment onwards the writer has signalled to us that the real conflict is between Nebuchadnezzar and YHWH. King Neb has laid down a challenge to the Lord of the universe.

The exchange that follows between the 3 men and the king picks up on this challenge. The men do not presume on God's action. For them, God is entirely free.

6. What do you find satisfying or unsatisfying about their response to the king in verses 17-18?

A. Things come to a head 3:19-23

Just as we have been expecting from the very start of the story things come to a head with the anticipated horror being made worse by the furnace being heated seven time hotter than its usual setting.

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C. Unexpected twist - Deus ex machina 3:24-27

Even though we as readers have been anticipating the men's deliverance, no-one is expecting to see a fourth man in the furnace.

8. What is the impact of this 4th man in the fire? Surely he is of interest to the reader but he does not come out of the burning fiery furnace and is not even mentioned again! Nebuchadnezzar assumes that he is an angel (verse 28).
9. Why do you think that the writer is silent about him?

D. Resolution 3:28-29

Read again what king Nebuchadnezzar says in these verses. In the light of Israel's history of past failure to live according to God's ways, verse 28 speaks volumes, especially when these words are spoken by a foreign, pagan king.

10. What does this say to us about God's faithfulness to his covenant promises in preserving a faithful remnant?

E. Coda 3:30

11. Read the last verse of both chapters 1 & 2. How do they compare with this last verse of chapter 3?

The following NT verses challenge us at the level of our commitment to honouring the Lord Jesus. As with the three men in Daniel's day as God's people we're never promised a safe passage through every trial. God does promise however to be with us in the trial.

Read the following verses and identify the challenges and words of comfort that they contain. Pray for one another in the light of them.

Matthew 10:28-33

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. 32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

1 Peter 4:12-19

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. **17** For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18** And

*"If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"*

19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.