

## Daniel 3:1-15 - Worship the Golden Image

© 2008-2017 Tony Garland - [contact@SpiritAndTruth.org](mailto:contact@SpiritAndTruth.org)

COURSE COMMENTARY



### 3:1 - An Image of Gold

- Context of Daniel 3

Questions addressed by this chapter:

(1) When Nebuchadnezzar issues a decree contradicting God's law regarding the worship of idols (Ex. 20:4-5; Lev. 26:1), how are the Jews to respond?

(2) What risks must the Jews be willing to face to remain faithful to God?

(3) Will God always intervene to rescue His people from their plight, as He does in this chapter for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego?

Chapter 3 must be seen within theme of overall book: foreshadows the preservation of the Jews in the future "fiery furnace" experience Scripture refers to as the Great Tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble.

- An Image of Gold

*Image* is *tselem*, the same word described the image Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream in Daniel 2.

The LXX renders *tselem* as *ει'κόννα*, [*eikona*], the same word used in the Greek NT for the image of the beast from the sea, the Antichrist, which all the world is forced to worship at the time of the end (Rev. 13:14-15).

Questions concerning the image: (1) When did Nebuchadnezzar erect the golden image? (2) Why did Nebuchadnezzar erect the golden image? (3) What did the golden image represent?

- When was the Image Erected?

A considerable amount of time must have elapsed since the events of chapter 2.

Nebuchadnezzar's response to an attempted revolt (ca. 595-594 B.C.)?

Following the final overthrow and destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C.?

- Why was the Image Erected?

To consolidate power in a show of forced submission following the coup attempt of 594/595 B.C.?

To show that Babylon was on a par with other world powers?

To achieve unity in his geopolitically diverse realm through unified worship?

To declare the continuance of the Babylonian Empire?

## The Image of Gold

A combination of one or more of the above reasons?

- **What Did the Image Represent?**

A geometrical shape or astronomical body?

One of the Babylonian gods?

The form of a man?

Religious and political aspects: this merger of the religious and the political seems intentional and reflects the typological connection between the events of Daniel 3 and the Great Tribulation. In a similar way, the political ruler of the final global kingdom during the Times of the Gentiles, the Antichrist, seeks worship (Rev. 13:4,14-15).

- **The Dimensions of the Image**

“height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits” (Dan. 3:1)

The relative dimensions of the image, 60-to-6 (10-to-1), are disproportionate for a human image. If the image was of a human form, it probably stood elevated atop a gold pedestal. 46 A pedestal would have allowed the image to be visible to the multitude gathered for the dedication ceremony.

The sexagesimal-based dimensions draw our attention to the number six, having Biblical significance as the number of man which represents **man's incompleteness and human willfulness**.

- **The Number of Man**

Man was created on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26-27)

The height of Goliath is given as **six** cubits and a span (1S. 17:4)

The weight of Goliath's spearhead was **six** hundred shekels (1S. 17:7)

The giant men of Gath had **six** fingers on each hand and **six** toes on each foot (2S. 21:20; 1Chr. 20:6)

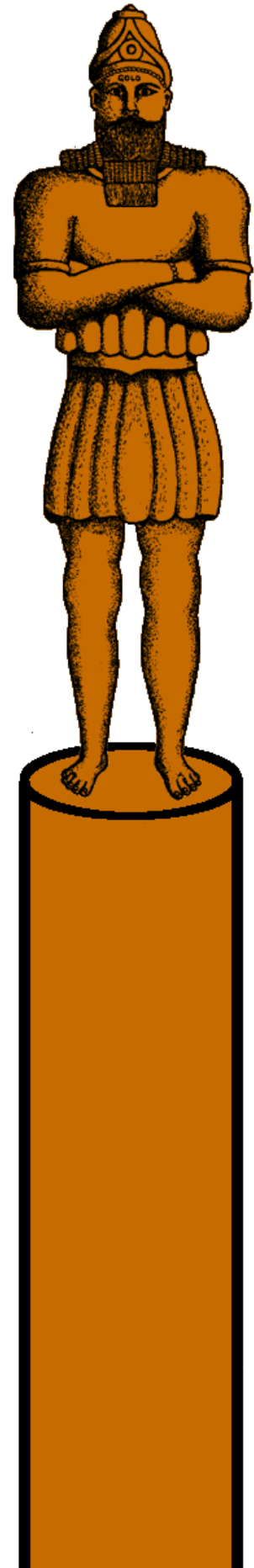
The weight of gold that came to Solomon yearly was **six** hundred and **sixty-six** talents of gold (2Chr. 9:13)

Solomon's throne had **six** steps (2Chr. 9:18)

The idolatrous image erected by Nebuchadnezzar was **sixty** cubits tall and **six** cubits wide (Dan. 3:1)

There were **six** waterpots of stone that Jesus used when changing water to wine (John 2:6)

The number of the beast, **666**, is said to be the number of a man (Rev. 13:18)



- **Foreshadowing the Great Tribulation**

Worship of the beast and his image - Worship demanded by the rulers of both the **first** and **last** kingdoms of the Times of the Gentiles (2Th. 2:4; Rev. 13:8,15).

**The preservation of Israel** - The preservation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego amidst the fiery furnace following their refusal to worship the image points toward the preservation of the nation of Israel during the Great Tribulation (Mat. 24:21; Mark 13:19; Rev. 2:22; 7:14), the “time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7 cf Isa. 13:12; Dan. 12:1).

**Unity Through False Worship** - The attempt by Nebuchadnezzar to achieve unity within his realm by wedding religious and political allegiance will be taken up again by the Antichrist at the time of the end (Rev. 13:11-15).

**The Beginning and End of the Times of the Gentiles** - This chapter records the prideful idolatry of the first kingdom whereas Revelation 13 (and elsewhere) record the prideful idolatry of the last kingdom during the time when global rule remains vested in Gentiles hands.

### 3:2-3 - Dedication Ceremony

- **Gathered Together**

Only those in leadership positions are invited to the dedication ceremony. This could indicate that one of his motives for dedicating the image was to elicit a show of allegiance and unity from his leaders following an insurrection or politically unstable situation in Babylon.

In their absence, we would naturally assume the affairs of the nation continued to operate normally by the hand of those under them within the government.

### 3:4-6 - Commanded to Worship

- **Peoples, Nations, Languages**

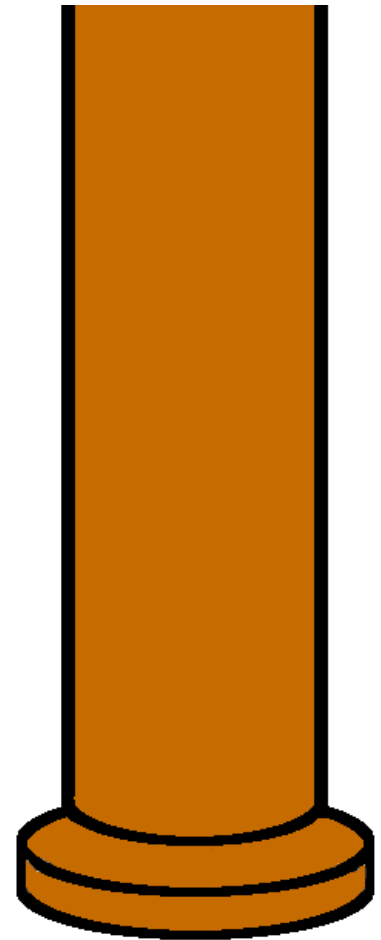
The phrase *peoples, nations, and languages* is rendered in the LXX by **λαοί, φυλαί, γλώσσαι** [*laoi, phylai, glōssai*]. The global character of Nebuchadnezzar’s expansive realm typifies the global realm of the final Gentile kingdom, composed of **φυλς και γλώσσης και λαοῦ**, [*phyls kai glōssēs kai laou,*] “tribes and tongues and nations” (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 14:6; 17:15).

- **Music and Worship**

Music is an important element of worship, as revealed in Scripture (e.g., Ps. 96:1-4; 66:4-5; 108:1-3).

In this setting, music served as a *lingua franca* among the different nationalities.

The music served as a powerful aid to influence the emotions of the crowd—to sway them to acknowledge the grandeur of the image and to more-easily bow in worship.



This image is a modified, color-enhanced version of the original work of [Clarence Larkin](#), now in the public domain. Enhanced image is placed in the public domain.

- **Politics and Religion**

Overlap between political and religious: worshipping the statue also expressed loyalty to the king, recognizing his divine right to rule.

Nebuchadnezzar's ceremony illustrates the well-worn path of totalitarian leaders who prostitute religion in the service of egotistical political aspirations. He is one of many in the line extending from Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-9) to Antichrist (Rev. 13:15).

- **Pluralistic Worship**

Other cultures and religious beliefs could accommodate pluralistic worship, but, the Jews could not.

Pluralistic religious beliefs will accept and tolerate additional gods beyond their own, but become very intolerant of any belief system which makes exclusive claims, such as Judaism and Christianity.

- **The Fiery Furnace**

If the music was the motivating carrot, the furnace is the motivating stick.

The immediacy of the punishment implies the furnace was already in operation nearby.

The furnace may have been a kiln that was used during construction of the image.

If the furnace was used to produce the idol, being cast into the furnace could represent a kind of "sacrifice" to the idol.

Jeremiah mentions Nebuchadnezzar's reputation for punishing enemies with fire. *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in My name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall slay them before your eyes. And because of them a curse shall be taken up by all the captivity of Judah who are in Babylon, saying, "The LORD make you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire"; because they have done disgraceful things in Israel, have committed adultery with their*

## Babylonian Musician



Old Babylonian relief of a musician, [Istanbul Ancient Orient Museum](#). Copyright © 2012 [www.BiblePlaces.com](#). This image appears by special permission and may not be duplicated for use in derivative works.

## Old Lime Kiln



Old Welsh lime kiln (53°08'50.3"N 4°19'39.9"W). "The burning fiery furnace of Dan. 3:6, etc., must have been similar to our common lime-kiln, with a perpendicular shaft from the top and an opening at the bottom for extracting the fused lime..." — Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, 202. Image courtesy of [Eric Jones](#), 2007. This image is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 license](#).

*neighbors' wives, and have spoken lying words in My name, which I have not commanded them. Indeed I know, and am a witness, says the LORD. (Jer. 29:21-23)*

## 3:7-12 - The Jews Refuse

- **Certain Jews**

What was the motivation of the accusers?

Jews were among the subjugated peoples under the thumb of Babylon who would have been expected to occupy positions of servitude rather than leadership.

Their accusers may have been in a position to profit from their displacement—perhaps gaining appointment in their place.

Antisemitism?

- **Uniqueness of Israel**

If antisemitism can be pictured as a smoldering fire, then one of the coals fueling that fire is the **uniqueness of the Jews** (e.g., Ex. 33:16; Nu. 23:9; Est. 3:8; Eze. 20:32-33; Acts 16:19-21).

Since the cross, similar characteristics (separateness, exclusive purpose and calling, testifying of God's law) characterize all who believe in Israel's Messiah: Jesus Christ (Mat. 5:10-12; Mark 13:9-13; John 15:18; Php. 1:29; 2Ti. 3:12; Heb. 11:35-37).

- **Where was Daniel?**

The text simply doesn't say, but a number of suggestions have been made:

1. Daniel's high position, second in command below Nebuchadnezzar, meant his allegiance was unquestioned. There was no need for him to participate in the ceremony.
2. Since the king and most other leaders were at the ceremony, Daniel remained in Babylonian to administer affairs in their absence.
3. Daniel was absent from Babylon on an affair of state at the time of the ceremony.
4. The king purposefully sent Daniel abroad to exempt him from the possibility of facing execution for his religious faithfulness.
5. Daniel served within the royal court, not in the province. Only leaders in the province were required to attend.
6. Daniel was not the only high-level individual who was absent. For example, the list of invitees makes no mention of the "wise men" over whom Daniel was made administrator (Dan. 2:48).
7. Daniel's reputation in spiritual matters so intimidated the accusers that, although he was present and refused to bow, they dared not include him among the accused.
8. Daniel may have been sick, as on other occasions (Dan. 7:28; 8:27; 10:8,16).

## 3:13-15 - A Second Chance for Compromise

- **Who is that God?**

Nebuchadnezzar's series of victories over his enemies had led him to conclude that he and his patron gods were unstoppable.

Like the leaders of other enemies of Israel such as Pharaoh of Egypt and Sennacherib of Assyria (Ex. 5:2; 2K. 18:35; 2Chr. 32:15-17), Nebuchadnezzar makes the dangerous mistake of slighting the power of Israel's God.

Nebuchadnezzar would find out, as Sennacherib had before him, that the God of the universe was listening to his challenge and would respond with judgment (Daniel 4:30)

Contrast Nebuchadnezzar's haughty attitude with Darius' expression of faith when Daniel's life is at stake! *So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you."* (Dan. 6:16)

The subsequent events of the chapter bring Nebuchadnezzar to answer his own question: *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,... there is no other God who can deliver like this."* (Dan. 3:28-29)

- **Standing Resolute**

The Jews boldly reply, *We have no need to answer you.*

The boldness and ease with which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego's respond to Nebuchadnezzar reflects their predetermined resolve to obey God.

Here is evidence of their ongoing relationship with God, wherein they consistently served Him.

Because they lived according to Biblical principles, they had no need to deliberate the matter, as would have been necessary if they had practiced situational ethics, as is popular among believers today.

Their boldness originated in their confidence before God: they were convinced their situation was sure to gain God's attention (Pr. 28:1).

Their ready answer must have been prompted by the Spirit of God (Mat. 10:19-20; Mark 13:11; Luke 12:11-12; 21:12-15; Acts 4:13).