

Daniel 3 - John Karmelich

I have to admit, this chapter has been very personal to me. There are three words from the King James translation that has always meant a lot to me: They are "and if not". That phrase is a good summary of our witness for God. I'll explain: Imagine a situation where there's no hope unless God performs some sort of miracle. The attitude of the heroes here is in effect, "Even if God chooses not to rescue us, we'll still honor Him as God, and use our dying breath as a witness for Him"! Of course I want to live a long life and die at an old age. I've always viewed the "how long" issue as God's business. I hold the view I don't fear death, but I am not crazy about pain! Most of us won't die as martyrs. As I was taught, dying for Jesus is relatively easy, the hard part's living for Him the rest of our lives. Keep in mind that these 3 main characters here got to live through their predicament and became strong witnesses for God. After this chapter, nothing else is written about these three men. They were great witnesses and scholars just figure they must have lived the rest of their lives a good witness for God because when the "chips were on the line" the three main characters stood out as a witness for Him. That's the issue here before us.

So where was Daniel? In the end of the last chapter, the ruler of a large empire based in Babylon made Daniel his "number 2 guy" after telling that king what he dreamed and what it meant. Those who study this text figure Daniel was away at this time doing the king's business or else he didn't have to obey the king as he already proved his worth to him. Either way, Daniel is not mentioned in this chapter. What I would argue is one of the things this chapter shows us is that when we're a good witness for Jesus, it'll affect others around us and the three central characters of this chapter who were Daniel's buddies got a chance to show how faith spreads and they got a chance to prove themselves. I'd argue this chapter got to be a part of the bible not just because of the miracle of how these three men were saved, but to show us an example of how to take a stand for God when again "the chips are on the line". Sometimes I will pray the phrase "and if not" inspires others to also take a stand for God in such tough situations!

OK, enough beating around the bush. Let me get into the details of the chapter itself. In the last one, it told the story Daniel telling Nebuchadnezzar (the Babylonian emperor) the meaning of a dream he had. In that dream, there was a large statue made of different materials. The head was made of gold. Daniel stated that the gold head was Nebuchadnezzar himself. The dream mentioned three kingdoms that will come after the Babylonians, and then the dream included a huge rock that will destroy the whole earth. Based on history, the 4th great empire would be the Romans. That means the rock ties to Jesus coming to rule the world one day when the Roman Empire is somehow revised but in a weekend state (like the European Commonwealth today). By the way, Daniel as a book is part of an Old Testament translation into Greek in 270BC. Later chapters give details that occurred well after that date. That just means I'm positive Daniel lived when this book was written.

I also suspect Nebuchadnezzar "tuned out" when he heard he was the golden head! Daniel didn't say to the king what empire would conquer his as it would give him a clue where to concentrate his armies! It leads us to Chapter 4. It's probably 20 years later. Nebuchadnezzar built a gold covered statue that did stand 90 feet high and was 9 feet wide. Most likely it was a statue of him on a giant pedestal. He put it on a flat area south of the city of Babylon. Whether it was out of ego or fear of being conquered, he did give an order that everyone there was to bow down and worship this idol. The idol was of the chief god in Babylonian at that time. History records an uprising against Nebuchadnezzar occurred shortly before this time, and I wonder if he set the statue to see who was loyal to him!

The text makes a big deal about the fact that six specific types of musical instruments were used to call people to bow down and worship this symbol. The dimensions for the statue were multiples of six (as

in a "cubit" which is roughly 18 inches). In that culture, they counted in "sevens" as opposed to "tens". I mention that system as the number "six" is prevalent in this chapter. The number six represents man in the sense of being "one short of perfection". Anyway it's a simple proof that Daniel was there as he used the fact that everything was "six based" in the Babylonian culture.

Meanwhile back to the story itself. The order was given for everyone to bow down to this thing. That leads us back to Daniel's three friends who were also taken prisoner when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, and wanted to raise some Jewish men in the Babylonian culture probably to rule over Israel. An Old Testament law is not to worship any god except God-Himself. Therefore these three men went along with the cultural training, but it's still a matter of honoring God alone. There had to have been at least, some other Jewish men in that training program and we don't read of anyone else disobeying the order. I'm sure other Israelites thought, "No big deal, we'll bow now so we can stay alive and confess it as sin later!" However, Daniel's three friends remembered their Jewish roots and refused to bow down. In Chapter 2, Daniel gave these three guys got top jobs in Babylon. Now, when the "chips were on the line" the text says some local Babylonians wanted to get rid of these three guys. They probably said in effect, "Your highness, the three Jewish men you put in charge, won't bow, so what should we do with them your highness?"

I noticed Nebuchadnezzar didn't say "Go kill them" there on the spot. He knew that Daniel requested to give his three friends top jobs in town, so maybe Nebuchadnezzar wanted to examples out of them, as I suspect he feared an overthrow. He brought them to room with a big heater. The text says those three men were still dressed appropriately for work (dressed up). Nebuchadnezzar had his soldiers bind them in ropes and threatened to throw them in the fire unless they bowed. Here's where we get the famous "and if not" speech. Nebuchadnezzar request the fire be heated much hotter as if that makes it worse! As the soldiers threw the men in the fire, the soldiers accidentally fell in the fire. God allowed that to show us how He preserves His own through the fires of life and those who don't face a future of eternal fire. So why didn't God punish Nebuchadnezzar at this point? We'll read in the next chapter how he got saved!

In the fire, we read that only the ropes were burned off and the three heroes didn't even have a smell of smoke on their clothes. The text says Nebuchadnezzar saw four men in the fire that did not burn! Most likely he was watching from a balcony. Jewish scholars argue the fourth one was an angel. I like those Christian scholars who argue it was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. Realize this part of the book is written in a non-Jewish language called Aramaic (Chapters 3-8). Now think of the image of the Jewish people being preserved through a fire while those who don't believe in God are burned up (a picture of eternal damnation). At the same time God is focusing on the non-Jewish people seeking Him!

The conclusion is Nebuchadnezzar was impressed and told the three to come out of the fire. My guess is the king turned to the men who accused the three Jewish men. What the king said in effect is he was impressed by the Jewish God and praised God for what he can do. The chapter ends with the three men getting promotions. Obviously we won't be in situations like this in our life. Still we're called to live as a witness for Jesus. We got to remember forever is a lot longer than this lifetime, and be willing to say "and if not" when things get tough in our life.

If interested, the other two links on this chapter are a more detailed lesson that I did write about twenty years ago. You're welcome to read that if you'd like. Either way, I'm grateful that you did read this! If you're new here, realize you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again, John