

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

Nebuchadnezzar, having erected an image, whose height (including probably a very high pedestal) was sixty cubits, and the breadth six, ordered a numerous assembly, which he had convened, to fall down and worship it; threatening, at the same time, that whosoever refused should be cast into a fiery furnace, Daniel 3:1-7; a punishment not uncommon in that country, (see Jeremiah 29:22.) Daniel's three companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who were present, being observed to refrain from this idolatrous worship, were accused before the king; who, in great wrath, commanded them to comply with his orders on pain of death, Daniel 3:8-15. But these holy men, with the greatest composure and serenity, expressed their firm resolution not to worship his gods or his images, whatever might be the consequence, Daniel 3:16-18. Upon which the king, unaccustomed to have his will opposed, in the height of his wrath, ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual, and these men to be cast into it, bound by the most mighty of his army, who were killed by the flame in the execution of this service, Daniel 3:19-23. On this occasion God literally performed his promise by Isaiah, (Isaiah 43:2): "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee;" for an angel of God, appearing in the furnace, protected these young men, and counteracted the natural violence of the fire; which, only consuming the cords with which they were bound, left them to walk at liberty, and in perfect safety, in the midst of the furnace. The king, astonished at this prodigy, called to them to come out of the furnace, and blessed God for sending an angel to deliver his servants; and commanded all his subjects, upon pain of death, not to speak irreverently of the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who were promoted to great power and honor, Daniel 3:24-30. A striking example of the interposition of Providence in favor of true and inflexible piety.

Verse 1

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold - It is supposed that the history given here did not occur till the close, or near the end, of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. For it was after his insanity, as we see Daniel 4:33-36, and this happened near the close of his reign. The authorized version, which is followed in the margin, fixes the date of this event seventeen years earlier, and ten years before the king's insanity. A few observations on this image may be necessary: -

1.It is not likely that this image was in human form - the dimensions show the improbability of this; for what proportion is there between sixty cubits (ninety feet) in length, and six cubits (nine feet) in breadth?

2.It is not likely that this image was all of gold; for this would have required more of this precious metal than the whole province of Babylon could produce; for as I suppose the sixty cubits apply to the perpendicular altitude, so I take it for granted that the six cubits intend the diameter. Now a column of gold of this height in diameter, upon the supposition that the pillar was circular, contains five thousand seven hundred and twenty-five and a half cubic feet; and as there are nineteen thousand avoirdupois ounces in a cubic foot, the weight of the whole pillar would be eight million two hundred and sixty-two thousand eight hundred and six pounds, ten ounces of gold.

3.It might have been a pillar on which an image of the god Bel was erected. The image itself might be of gold, or more probably gilt, that is, covered with thin plates of gold, and on this account it might be called the golden image; and most probably the height of the image may be confounded with the height of the pillar. Or perhaps it was no more than a pillar, on the sides of which their gods and sacred emblems were engraven, surmounted with Bel on the top.

The plain of Dura - The situation of this place is not exactly known; there was a town or city called Dura, or Doura, in Mesopotamia, near the Tigris.

Verse 2

Sent to gather together the princes - It is not easy to show what these different offices were, as it is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the Chaldee words. Parkhurst analyzes them thus: -

The Princes - *achashdarpenaiya*, from *Achash*, great or eminent, and *dar* (dar), "to go about freely," and *panim*, "the presence." Satraps or privy counsellors who had free access to the presence of the king.

The Governors - *signaiya*, lieutenants or viceroys, for *sagan*, among the Hebrews, was the name of the high priest's deputy.

The Captains - פָּחָדְוָזָא (pachavatha), from פָּחַד (pach), to extend, because set over those provinces that had been annexed to the kingdom by conquest. (Pashas) - This word and office are still in use in Asiatic countries. By corruption we pronounce bashaw.

The Judges - אֲדָרְגָזַרַיָא (adargazeraiya), from אֲדָר (adar), noble or magnificent, and גָּזַר (gazar), to decree. The nobles, the assistants to the king in making laws, statutes, etc. The same probably in Babylon, as the House of Lords in England.

The Treasurers - גִּדְבֵרַיָא (gedaberaiya), from גָּזַר (ganaz), (the ז (zain) being changed into ד (daleth), according to the custom of the Chaldee), to treasure up, and בָּר (bar), pure. Those who kept the current coin, or were over the mint; the treasurers of the exchequer in Babylon.

The Counsellors - דֵּתְבֵרַיָא (dethaberaiya), from דָּת (dath), a statute, and בָּר (bar), אֶת־to declare the meaning of the law; אֶת־for in all ages and countries there has been what is termed the glorious uncertainty of the law; and therefore there must be a class of men whose business it is to explain it. What a pity that law cannot be tendered to the people as other sciences are, in plain, unsophisticated, and intelligible terms, and by persons whose business it is to show what is just and right, and not pervert truth, righteousness, and judgment.

The Sheriffs - תִּפְתָּיָא (tiphtaye), from תָּפַח (taphath), in Hebrew, שָׁפַח (shaphath), אֶת־to set in order. אֶת־Probably civil magistrates.

And all the rulers of the provinces - All other state or civil officers, not only to grace the solemnity, but to maintain order. My old Bible renders them: Satrapis, or wise men. Magistratis. Jugis. Duykis, Tyrauntis, or stronge men. Prefectis, and alle the Princes of Cuntreese.

Verse 4

Then a herald cried aloud - כַּרְזָא קַרָא בִּחַיִל (caroza kara bechayil), אֶת־a crier called with might. אֶת־A bedel cried mightili. - Old MS. Bible.

Verse 5

The sound of the Cornet - There is not less difficulty in ascertaining the precise meaning of these musical instruments than there is in the offices in Daniel 3:2. קַרְנָא (karna), here translated cornet, is the common blowing horn, which makes a deep and hollow sound, as well as one shrill and piercing.

Flute - מַשְׂרֹקֶתָא (mashrokitha), from שָׂרַק (sharak), to whistle, shriek. A wind instrument which made a strong and shrill noise, such as the hautbois or clarionet.

Harp - קִיְתָרוֹסָא (kithros), cytharus; קִיְתָרוֹסָא . Some kind of stringed instrument. It seems to be formed from the Greek word.

Sackbut - סַבְבֵּחָא (sabbecha). The Greek has it ἰσχυρὸν ἰσχυρὸν ἰσχυρὸν , from which our word sackbut, from סַבַּח (sabach), to interweave; probably on account of the number of chords, for it seems to have been a species of harp.

Psaltery - פְּסַלְתֵּרָא (pesanterin); Greek, ἰσχυρὸν ἰσχυρὸν ἰσχυρὸν . A stringed instrument, struck with a plectrum; that called santeer in Egypt is probably the same. Dr. Russel says: אֶת־it is a large triangle, and has two bottoms two inches from each other, with about twenty catguts of different sizes. אֶת־It was the ancient psalterium, and most probably the same as David's harp.

Dulcimer - סֻמְפוֹנֵיָא (sumponeyah); Greek, ἰσχυρὸν ἰσχυρὸν ἰσχυρὸν . Probably a kind of tamboor, tambourine, or tomtom drum. It does not mean the same as the Greek symphonia, which signifies a concert or harmony of many instruments, for here one kind of instrument only is intended.

All kinds of music - כָּל זֵנֵי זֵמָרָא (col zeney zemara), the whole stock, or band, of music; the preceding being the chief, the most common, and the most sonorous. My old MS. Bible has, Trumpe, and Pipe, and Harpe: Sambuke, Santrie, and Synfonye, and al kynde of musykes.

Verse 6

Shall the same hour - This is the first place in the Old Testament where we find the division of time into hours.

The Greeks say that Anaximander was the inventor. He had it probably from the Chaldeans, among whom this division was in use long before Anaximander was born.

Be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace - This was an ancient mode of punishment among the Chaldeans, if we may credit the tradition that Abram was cast into such a fire by this idolatrous people because he would not worship their idols.

Verse 8
Accused the Jews - That is, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. The other Jews were left unnoticed; and probably at this time Daniel was too high to be touched; but we may rest assured that he was not found among these idolaters, see Daniel 3:12.

Verse 16
We are not careful - We have no need to put thee to any farther trouble; we have made up our minds on this subject, and have our answer ready: Be it known unto thee, We Will Not Serve Thy Gods. This was as honest as it was decisive.

Verse 17
If it be so - Thou mayest cast us into the furnace; the terror of it has no effect on our minds to induce us to alter the resolution we have taken, nor shall the fire change our purpose. We serve a God who is able to deliver us. Should he not, we are equally determined; but we are satisfied that in some way or other he will deliver us out of thy hand. Thy power cannot affect us in the kingdom of our God to which we shall ascend from thy furnace, should he permit the fire to kindle upon us. *Render to Caesar the things which are Caesar's, is a maxim of Jesus Christ; but when Caesar arrogates to himself the things that are the Lord's, then, and in such cases, his authority is to be resisted. God does not desire Caesar's things; Caesar's must not have the things of God.*

Verse 19
Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury - How strange is this, after having had so many proofs of the supremacy of Jehovah! He had seen how God poured contempt upon his authority in the case of the three Hebrews, and yet he will try his strength once more! How infatuated is man!

Seven times more - As hot as it could be made. Seven expresses the great intensity of the heat.

Verse 20
The most mighty men - The generals, or chief officers of his army; not strong men, there was no need of such.

Verse 21
Their hats - This word, hat, is found only in this place in the Old Testament. The word *sarbal* properly means an outer garment. Herodotus, who lived about one hundred years after Daniel, says, *the dress of the Babylonians consisted of a tunic of linen reaching down to the feet; over this a tunic of woollen; and over all a white short cloak or mantle, and on their heads they wore turbans.* Following this, Mr. Parkhurst translates the verse thus: *Then these three men were bound in their Cloaks, their Turbans, and in their Upper (woollen) Tunics, and their Under (linen) Tunics.* And as, according to this interpretation, their hats were their outermost garments, we see the propriety with which it is observed at Daniel 3:27 that these were not changed by the fire.

Verse 23
And these three men - fell down bound - There is a most evident want of connection between this and the following verse; and it is between these verses that the apocryphal Song of the Three Children, as it is called, has been inserted by St. Jerome and others; but with this note: *Quae sequuntur in Hebraeis voluminibus non reperi;* *What follows I have not found in the Hebrew books.* And then begins, *They walked in the midst of the flame, praising God, and blessing the Lord.* The Septuagint and Arabic read the twenty-fourth verse thus: *Then Nebuchadnezzar heard them singing praise, and was astonished.* To connect the two verses Houbigant adds two verses found in the Vulgate, which are the forty-ninth and the twenty-third: *But an angel of the Lord went down with Azariah and his companions into the furnace, and drove out the flame of fire from the furnace; and they walked in the midst of the furnace.* This verse (the forty-ninth) has been added to show the reason of Nebuchadnezzar's astonishment, and also to account for the appearance of a fourth person in the furnace, as in verse 25.

Verse 25

Is like the Son of God - A most improper translation. What notion could this idolatrous king have of the Lord Jesus Christ? for so the place is understood by thousands. *bar elahin* (bar elahin) signifies a son of the gods, that is, a Divine person or angel; and so the king calls him in Daniel 3:28: "God hath sent his Angel, and delivered his servants." And though even from this some still contend that it was the Angel of the covenant, yet the Babylonish king knew just as much of the one as he did of the other. No other ministration was necessary; a single angel from heaven was quite sufficient to answer this purpose, as that which stopped the mouths of the lions when Daniel was cast into their den.

Verse 27

Upon whose bodies the fire had no power - The heathens boasted that their priests could walk on burning coals unhurt; and Virgil mentions this of the priests of Apollo of Soracte: -

Summe Deum, sancti custos Soractis Apollo!

Quem primi colimus, cui pineus ardor acervo

Pascitur; et medium, freti pietate, per ignem

Cultores multa premimus vestigia pruna.

Virg. Aen. 11:785.

O Phoebus, guardian of Soracte's woods

And shady hills; a god above the gods;

To whom our natives pay the rites divine,

And burn whole crackling groves of hallowed pine;

Walk through the fire in honor of thy name,

Unhurt, unsinged, and sacred from the flame.

Pitts.

But Varro tells us that they anointed the soles of their feet with a species of unguent that preserved them from being burnt. Very lately a female showed many feats of this kind, putting red hot iron upon her arms, breasts, etc., and passing it over her hair without the slightest inconvenience; but in the case of the three Hebrews all was supernatural, and the king and his officers well knew it.

Verse 28

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, etc. - Here is a noble testimony from a heathen. And what produced it? The intrepidly pious conduct of these three noble Jews. Had they been time-servers, the name of the true God had not been known in Babylon. What honor does the Lord put on them that are steadfast in the faith!

Verse 29

Speak any thing amiss - Though by the decree the king does not oblige the people to worship the true God, yet he obliges them to treat him with reverence.

Verse 30

Then the king promoted, etc. - He restored them to the offices which they held before the charge of disobedience and treason was brought against them.

At the end of this verse the Septuagint add, "And he advanced them to be governors over all the Jews that were in his kingdom." This may be the meaning of the latter verse. They were more likely to be set over the Jews than over the Chaldeans.