

3. THE GOLDEN STATUE
DANIEL 3:1-30 + Greek extras

¹King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ²Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent for the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to assemble and come to the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

³So the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. When they were standing before the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up, ⁴the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, you are to fall down and worship the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶Whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire."

⁷Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshipped the golden statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸Accordingly, at this time certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, shall fall down and worship the golden statue, ¹¹and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. ¹²there are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O King. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up."

The statue is ninety feet high and nine feet wide!

The names of the various officials in verses 2 and 3 are borrowed from Persian or Babylonian (Akkadian). The word 'herald' in verse 4 may be a loan word from Greek (*kēru*x). Besides Aramaic, Persian, Akkadian and Elamite were among the most important languages (verse 4) spoken in the Persian Empire.

The instruments 'lyre', 'harp' and 'drum' (verse 5) are loan words from Greek: *kitharis*, *psaltērion* and *symphōnia*. Nowhere else in Daniel do we have words derived from Greek.

Daniel's three companions, called here by the Babylonian names (see 1:7), feature in this story. They do not appear after chapter 3, and were mentioned in chapters 1 and 2 to prepare the way for this scene. It would appear that they belong to an independent tradition from the stories about Daniel. The authors of the Book of Daniel are offering them as models for the persecuted Jews for whom they are writing. They are willing to die as martyrs rather than worship another 'god'.

¹³Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? ¹⁵You must be ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and what god is there who is able to save you from my hands?"

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. ¹⁷If there is a God able to save us, such as our God whom we serve, he will save us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸But even if there were not, you can be sure, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up."

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, ²⁰and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. ²¹So the men were bound, still wearing their trousers, their shirts, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. ²²Because the king's command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire.

The Greek Versions (Old Greek and 'Theodotion') follow verse 23 with a prose introduction (verses 24-25), followed by a prayer of Azariah (Abednego in the above text) in poetic form (verses 26-45).

This is followed by another prose introduction (verse 46-51), and a hymn sung by the three men while in the furnace (verses 52-90).

See after the following page.

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the God of Israel

²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counsellors, "Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?" They answered the king, "True, O king." ²⁵He replied, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of a god."

²⁶Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counsellors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.

²⁸Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

These verses are numbered 91-97 in the Greek Versions which insert here verses 24-90 (see following pages).

The Aramaic word translated 'counsellors' is derived from Persian.

The expression 'son of a god' (see also Genesis 6; Psalm 29:1) is borrowed from Near Eastern polytheistic mythology. In verse 28 it is interpreted as 'an angel'.

Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the God of the three men as 'the Most High God' (verse 26).

Nebuchadnezzar is presented as acknowledging the God of the three Jewish men (verses 28-29; compare 2:46-47). He passes a decree that anyone blaspheming against the God of Israel will be executed, 'for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way' (verse 29).

As retold in the circumstances of the persecution under Antiochus, this story would have encouraged the Jews to resist idol worship, even at the risk of martyrdom (see 1 Maccabees 2:59).

Daniel was promoted at the conclusion of the previous story (see 2:48). His three companions are promoted at the conclusion to this story (verse 30; see 2:49).

The Prayer of Azariah (verses 24-45, from the Greek Version)

See pages 89-90 for an introduction to this Greek addition. Though the Theodotion Version which we are following attributes this Prayer to Azariah (see verse 25), the Old Greek attributes it to all three of the young men. The effect of this Prayer is to focus on the piety and heroism of the three young men who are willing to face death rather than betray their faith.

Verses 24-25 are a prose introduction to the prayer (verses 26-45). Azariah praises God for his just judgments, and goes on to confess the sins of his people that have brought down on them God's just punishment. A comparison could be made with national laments that are found in the Psalter (see Psalms 44, 74, 79 and 80).

Verses 26-28 praise God for his justice (compare Daniel 9:14; Ezra 9:15; Nehemiah 9:33).

Verses 29-31 acknowledge that it is sin that is the cause of the punishment (compare Daniel 9:5; Ezra 9:6; Nehemiah 9:26).

Verses 32-33 describes the suffering they are enduring. The 'most wicked king' could refer to Antiochus.

Verses 34-36 recall the promises of the covenant.

²⁴They walked around in the midst of the flames, singing hymns to God and blessing the Lord. ²⁵Then Azariah stood still in the fire and prayed aloud:

²⁶"Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and worthy of praise; and glorious is your name forever! ²⁷For you are just in all you have done; all your works are true and your ways right, and all your judgments are true. ²⁸You have executed true judgments in all you have brought upon us and upon Jerusalem, the holy city of our ancestors; by a true judgment you have brought all this upon us because of our sins.

²⁹For we have sinned and broken your law in turning away from you; in all matters we have sinned grievously. ³⁰We have not obeyed your commandments, we have not kept them or done what you have commanded us for our own good. ³¹So all that you have brought upon us, and all that you have done to us, you have done by a true judgment.

³²You have handed us over to our enemies, lawless and hateful rebels, and to an unjust king, the most wicked in all the world.

³³And now we cannot open our mouths; we, your servants who worship you, have become a shame and a reproach.

³⁴For your name's sake do not give us up forever, and do not annul your covenant.

³⁵Do not withdraw your mercy from us, for the sake of Abraham your beloved and for the sake of your servant Isaac and Israel your holy one, ³⁶to whom you promised to multiply their descendants like the stars of heaven and like the sand on the shore of the sea.

³⁷*For we, O Lord, have become fewer than any other nation, and are brought low this day in all the world because of our sins.*

³⁸*In our day we have no ruler, or prophet, or leader, no burnt offering, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, no place to make an offering before you and to find mercy.*

³⁹*Yet with a contrite heart and a humble spirit may we be accepted,* ⁴⁰*as though it were with burnt offerings of rams and bulls, or with tens of thousands of fat lambs; such may our sacrifice be in your sight today, and may we unreservedly follow you* (or 'find favour before you'), *for no shame will come to those who trust in you.*

⁴¹*And now with all our heart we follow you; we fear you and seek your presence.*

⁴²*Do not put us to shame, but deal with us in your patience and in your abundant mercy.* ⁴³*Deliver us in accordance with your marvellous works, and bring glory to your name, O Lord.* ⁴⁴*Let all who do harm to your servants be put to shame; let them be disgraced and deprived of all power, and let their strength be broken.* ⁴⁵*Let them know that you alone are the Lord God, glorious over the whole world."*

The Prose Narrative (verses 46-51)

⁴⁶*Now the king's servants who threw them in kept stoking the furnace with naphtha, pitch, tow, and brushwood.* ⁴⁷*And the flames poured out above the furnace forty-nine cubits,* ⁴⁸*and spread out and burned those Chaldeans who were caught near the furnace.* ⁴⁹*But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace to be with Azariah and his companions, and drove the fiery flame out of the furnace,* ⁵⁰*and made the inside of the furnace as though a moist wind were whistling through it. The fire did not touch them at all and caused them no pain or distress.* ⁵¹*Then the three with one voice praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace:*

In verses 37-38 we have further details of the suffering endured. In the post-exilic period prophecy was judged to have ceased (see Zechariah 13:3-6). The Babylonian exiles could not offer sacrifice, being separated from the temple. This was impossible also when Antiochus desecrated the temple in 167 (see Daniel 8:13-14).

'In our day' (verse 38) refers to the period of persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167-165BC). The Prayer appears to have been composed during that persecution.

Verses 39-41 continue the expression of sorrow (see verses 29-31).

Verses 42-45 is a prayer for deliverance (compare Daniel 9:16-19; Baruch 3:1-5).

This Prose Narrative must have been composed especially for this context, and probably in Greek. It underlines the power of the God of Israel and his care for the faithful martyrs.

'Forty-nine cubits' (7x7, verse 47) is 74 feet.

The Hymn of the Three Jews (verses 52-90, from the Greek Version)

The original language of this Hymn was probably Hebrew. Scholars note the resemblance between verses 52-53 and Tobit.

Tobias began by saying,
 “Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors, and blessed is your name in all generations forever. Let the heavens and the whole creation bless you forever.

– Tobit 8:5

The ‘temple of your holy glory’ (verse 53) could refer to the Jerusalem temple or to God’s temple in heaven (compare Psalm 11:4; Habakkuk 2:20). On the ‘cherubim’ (verse 54) see Psalm 80:1. On the ‘firmament’ (verse 56) see Genesis 1:6-8; Psalm 19:1.

Stanza One (verses 58-63) focuses on the heavens. For ‘the waters above the heavens’ (verse 60) see Genesis 1:7; 7:11; Psalm 148:4. The ‘powers’ (verse 61) includes the whole host of God’s creatures in the heavens (compare Psalm 103:21; 148:2).

Stanza Two (verses 64-73) focuses on the elements in the heavens that affect our earth (rain, dew, heat, the weather, light and dark, frost, snow, lightning, clouds). There appears to be some repetitions and extra material in this Stanza which point to explanatory comments finding their way into the text.

⁵²“Blessed are you, O Lord, God of our ancestors, and to be praised and highly exalted forever;

⁵³Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, and to be extolled and highly glorified forever.

⁵⁴Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne on the cherubim, and to be praised and highly exalted forever. ⁵⁵Blessed are you on the throne of your kingdom, and to be extolled and highly exalted forever. ⁵⁶Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven, and to be sung and glorified forever.

⁵⁷“Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

⁵⁸Bless the Lord, you heavens; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁵⁹Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶⁰Bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶¹Bless the Lord, all you powers of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶²Bless the Lord, sun and moon; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶³Bless the Lord, stars of heaven; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

⁶⁴“Bless the Lord, all rain and dew; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶⁵Bless the Lord, all you winds; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶⁶Bless the Lord, fire and heat; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶⁷Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶⁸Bless the Lord, dews and falling snow; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁶⁹Bless the Lord, nights and days; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁷⁰Bless the Lord, light and darkness; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁷¹Bless the Lord, ice and cold; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁷²Bless the Lord, frosts and snows; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. ⁷³Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

Hymn of the Three Jews

⁷⁴*“Let the earth bless the Lord; let it sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁷⁵*Bless the Lord, mountains and hills; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁷⁶*Bless the Lord, all that grows in the ground; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁷⁷*Bless the Lord, seas and rivers; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁷⁸*Bless the Lord, you springs; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁷⁹*Bless the Lord, you whales and all that swim in the waters; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸⁰*Bless the Lord, all birds of the air; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸¹*Bless the Lord, all wild animals and cattle; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸²*“Bless the Lord, all people on earth; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸³*Bless the Lord, O Israel; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸⁴*Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸⁵*Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸⁶*Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸⁷*Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.*
⁸⁸*“Bless the Lord, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. For he has rescued us from Hades and saved us from the power of death, and delivered us from the midst of the burning fiery furnace; from the midst of the fire he has delivered us.*
⁸⁹*Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever.*
⁹⁰*All who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods, sing praise to him and give thanks to him, for his mercy endures forever.”*

Stanza Three (verses 74-81) focuses on the land, the sea and the sky, and the creatures that inhabit them.

Stanza Four (verses 82-90) focuses on human beings, especially God’s chosen people.

The ‘servant’ are the temple personnel (see Psalm 134:1).

It is likely that verse 88 was composed by the scribe responsible for inserting this Hymn here in the Daniel Scroll.

Verse 89 is identical with Psalm 106:1, Psalm 107:1 and Psalm 136:1.