

## THE BOOK OF DANIEL

### Daniel 3:19-30 | Session 8 | The Fiery Furnace | B.C. 603-570 | Notes

For many people, there seems to be an inward desire for a master—someone to tell them what to do<sup>1</sup>. Just as we have all seen during the hysterical covid pandemic, when people are told what to do, they roll over and take the shot, stick a swab up their nose, put on a mask, or stay six feet apart—with absolutely zero scientific evidence that any of the measures work, no questions asked, and no concern of what chemical was just injected into their body. This lockstep obedience to the so-called government and media experts has been called *Mass Formation Psychosis*. To me, it seems more like, *The Twilight Zone*.

But *Mass Formation Psychosis* is real and has an unsuspecting cult following; some can't help but follow. It is a form of group hypnosis that destroys individuals' ethical self-awareness and robs them of their ability to think critically.<sup>2</sup> Given enough peer pressure and fear of reprisal for doing the wrong thing, it is likely that a totalitarian leader in any society can make people do anything he wants.

We saw this very thing happening in the last session of our study of Daniel. In chapter 3:4, the *herald cried aloud* to the people in Babylon, "*To you, it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages (a global order), ...whoso falleth down not and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace*" (Daniel 3:4,6). Since not many people wanted to die, they gave in and bowed down: Mass Formation.

In chapter 3, with the repetition of a specific phrase, Daniel is making a point of just how much propagandizing was occurring: He records the command of the king four times (vs. 5, 7, 10, 15), that everyone must *bow down at the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music*. This was some repeated rote command heard from the *herald* (vs. 5), which seems to have been replayed repeatedly; this is precisely how totalitarian leaders get into their subjects' heads.

The *heralding*, so to speak, of covid vaccines is a perfect example of how propaganda works today, the same way it did 2,500 years ago. Today it is by posters, internet pop-ups, signs on doors of establishments, loudspeakers in stores, etc.

My point in showing these slides is not to criticize those vaccinated but to present how we can be duped as a group, *mass formation*, into doing something we might never do as an individual.

Mass Formation Psychosis is a potent psychological and social pressure to stand up against. Research has shown that totalitarianism raises its ugly head; there are three different ways people respond to it:

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<sup>1</sup> Rejecting God's leadership, Israel desired a human king to rule over them. 1 Samuel 8:6.

<sup>2</sup> Mattias Desmet, Phd. *The Psychology of Totalitarianism*. Chelsea Green Publishing. June 2022.

1. The group who believes the propaganda and has bought into it. They are hypnotized and are in lockstep with every order that is announced. These people make up about 30% of the population. They are the ones who wear a mask while driving alone in their car, for example.
2. The second group is not hypnotized but does not believe the propaganda, yet they go along with it (or at least remain quiet) because they choose not to go against the grain. This group makes up about 40 to 60 percent of the population.
3. Then there is the third group that does not believe in mass-forming propaganda and speaks out against it. They make up about 10 to 30 percent of the population. These are the dissidents.

Group three is where we find Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. They were the only dissident voices. How were they able to go against the flow? First, they never lost their Biblical worldview. Second, they kept sight of the fact that the God they served was Supreme. Third, they never lost touch with the commandments of God, e.g., *Thou shalt have no other Gods beside me—thou shalt not worship any graven image*. Finally, they knew God would protect them—And even if he didn't, they would still not give in to mass formation psychosis. They would not lose their faith and would not bow down to a false idol, no matter what. These were courageous, bold men of faith.

The danger of being a dissident is that those *totalitarianized*, and the *totalitarian himself*, are not impressed when someone takes a stand, and the dissident can find himself in extreme danger. This is where we pick up the study from our last session.

Verse 19—

We noted in another session that Nebuchadnezzar was a *type* of the Antichrist who is to come. It is probable that throughout the *Times of the Gentiles*, while the Antichrist himself is not present in the world, the spirit of the antichrist is. This is what we are likely seeing with Nebuchadnezzar. In this case, his fury changed the form of his **visage** (face). I think this was more than just a change of expression or a frown on his face. Was he exhibiting the spirit of the antichrist that will one day persecute the world? Perhaps.

Notice what he does; he **commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than** it was usually heated. A fiery furnace *seven times* hotter? Could this foreshadow the seven-year Tribulation that will test God's people with fiery trials?

Verses 20,21—

It seems to be an overly hasty **command to the most mighty men in his army...to cast them into the burning fiery furnace**. The soldiers **bound** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego fully clothed and **cast** them *into the furnace in their coats, hosen* (probably a tunic), **hats** (more likely turbans), **and other garments**. Being thrown into a fire or burned at the stake has been a gruesome punishment over the centuries. Most of the ancient artwork depicting these executions shows the victim fully clothed, so this account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego being clothed doesn't appear anything unusual.

However, we shouldn't base our view of history entirely on artwork. In the 1940s, however, millions of Jews were stripped naked, gassed, and then thrown into ovens to be cremated.

Verses 22,23—

The **urgent order** to heat the **furnace exceedingly hot** didn't consider what would happen to anyone else who got near the oven; the **men** who took **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego** to the brink of the opening of the **furnace, the fire slew those men.**

Why did the Babylonians have hot furnaces in the first place? Some have suggested they were used to produce the finish on the brickwork for their magnificent construction projects, like the Ishtar Gate, which is made of glazed bricks. A reconstruction of the gate, excavated from Babylon from 1904 to 1914, can be seen in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin.

This wasn't the first time Nebuchadnezzar *roasted men in the fire*. The prophet Jeremiah 29:22 records this about two prophets. *"And of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captivity of Judah which are in Babylon, saying The LORD make thee like Zedekiah, and like Ahab, who the king of Babylon roasted in the fire."*

Heating the furnace too hot seems to be a knee-jerk reaction to his anger. A slower burning fire would have caused more torment, but some have said Nebuchadnezzar must have wanted the furnace as hot as his rage. This is why it is good advice not to make a decision in a moment of anger—counting to ten is an oft-used phrase with merit. Some may need to count to twenty!

There is nothing wrong with having anger. Anger is a God-given emotion that we all experience. After all, we are made in God's image, and God exhibits anger and wrath. But we are warned in Scripture to be "Slow to anger" (Proverbs 16:32). The apostle Paul wrote (Ephesians 4:25), "In your anger, do not sin." This verse is often misinterpreted to say *Anger is a sin!* The verse is telling us the opposite; to "Be angry!" It is written in the Greek imperative, which means it instructs us to be angry. The context of Ephesians 6 seems to be about *truth*. When there is lying and injustice, it should incite our emotion to anger, and do it before the sun goes down, don't harbor anger; let it out! But be angry for the right reasons.

Verses 24—

Assuming the three men would be dead, the **king was astonished; today, we use the word *astonished or astounded***. The word means what he saw figuratively *turned him to stone!* Another phrase we might use today is "He was stunned." **Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?** There is nothing from Nebuchadnezzar's words or actions that shows any dismay for his soldiers being killed. He was ruthless. There was little to like about the man. **True, O king, his counselors** replied.

Verse 25—

How the king could see into the furnace is unknown. He is viewing from a distance and somehow can see inside. Modern-day furnaces may give us a hint at how it was possible.

**I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire.** Presumably, the cords used to bind them had burned off, but the fire did not hurt the three men or another unknown figure. Nebuchadnezzar exclaims, **The fourth is like the Son of God.** The original language does not include the article **The**; it reads *a son of God*. The KJV capitalizes Son and God, which unfortunately has led many people to believe this was Jesus, standing with the three men.

Although we think of, rightly so, The Son of God as Jesus Christ, the king was not identifying Jesus as The Son of God. He would not have known anything about the person of Jesus in the New Testament. Nebuchadnezzar likely meant an angel of some kind (see vs. 28). So, who was the fourth? We are not told, but it was probably an angel sent by God to protect them. Later in chapter 6, Daniel will credit God for sending *his angel* and protecting him while he was in the lion's den. In chapter 12, there is a special angel, Michael, who *standeth* guard for Israel. Michael could be involved here. We also learn from Hebrews 1:14 that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister.

Verse 26,27—

The king called them out of the furnace, and in the presence of many witnesses, **not a hair on their head was singed.** The fact that the king, in his haste, had not stripped them of their clothing became a testimony of God's Sovereign control over the situation. **Neither were their coats burned or singed. Nor the smell of fire had passed on them.**

Jesus made a telling statement (Matthew 10:28) speaking of the Jews in the Tribulation, *"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna: the future destruction). Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore..."* No doubt Jews in the Tribulation will take solace in this passage.

Verse 28-30—

Nebuchadnezzar was a polytheist; he believed in many Gods, his favorite being the god Marduk. Nevertheless, a **decree** is made not to allow anyone to speak against **the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego.** Freedom of religion was not part of the Babylonian culture. The subjects of the empire believed what they were told to believe. **Blessed be the God...who hath sent his angel.** Should we believe in angels protecting us? Maybe. The verses which make that claim are all directed to Israel. Psalm 34:7 says, "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them." I think this verse has more to do with the salvation of Israel and the Son of God protecting them. Jesus, speaking to the disciples regarding the Kingdom of Heaven, said, "Despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10). One of the most famous verses that espouse the doctrine of guardian

angels is Hebrews 1:14, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Again, this is directed toward the Hebrews (Israel), who are *heirs*. My conclusion on guardian angels for us today? I don’t know; we will find out when we get to heaven. Trust in the Lord and not angels might be the safest way to look at it.

Nevertheless, the truth was spoken by Nebuchadnezzar, in that **there is no other God that can deliver after this sort**. The three men were **promoted**, or literally, *made to prosper in the province of Babylon*.

Nebuchadnezzar’s edict states that there shouldn’t be any dissident speech against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, or else they would be **cut in pieces, and their houses made a dunghill**, and it is undoubtedly not an edict we should cheer. The last thing we should ever want is the government forcing us to believe in a particular God with the threat of death if we don’t. This creates another form of totalitarianism and mass formation psychosis.

Today, men, women, boys, and girls can be saved, not by force, but by grace through faith.