

**Living Under the Authority of Christ, Our King,  
While Living in Earthly Kingdoms (Daniel 1-6)  
April 22 – May 20 2012, Week Three  
“Living Free in Christ” Daniel 3  
May 6 2012, Study Notes**

**Focus for Week Three**

Freedom. Many seek it; few find it. Slavery. Most oppose it; many live it. God created humans to live in the joy-filled freedom he designed for them. Humans repeatedly choose the sin that binds them to its slavery and its consequences, death. We looked closely at the contrast between this freedom and slavery by entering the story of Daniel 3.

Reading through Daniel 1-2, one sees that God is working to lead Nebuchadnezzar to both acknowledge the Most High God who rules over all and submit his life to this God. This process continues in Daniel 3 & 4. In Daniel 3, After Daniel has interpreted a dream for Nebuchadnezzar in which the king hears that he is the “head of gold” in this dream, he proceeds to build himself a statue that is 90 feet high and 9 feet wide and order the people to worship this statue.

As we looked closely at Daniel 3, we saw the contrast between the slavery that the king and his people lived in light of what they thought about their gods vs. the freedom that Daniel’s three friends lived in light of what they thought about the Most High God. This freedom is that for which God created and, in Christ, invites us to live.

**Summary of Message**

**1. What we think about God is the most important thing about us**

- a. We become like the gods we think about
- b. Others witness what we think about God

**2. We see this contrast in Daniel 3**

- a. What Nebuchadnezzar and the people of Babylon reflect demonstrates the slavery resulting from what they think about their gods.
- b. What Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego reflect demonstrates the freedom resulting from what they think about their gods.

**3. The Slavery of the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar**

- a. What did they think about their gods?

One can understand what shaped the Babylonian thinking about their gods by looking at their Creation Myth, called Enûma Elish (“Epic of Creation”). The Mesopotamian "Epic of Creation" dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century BC (based on oral sources earlier).

In the poem, the god Marduk (or Assur in the Assyrian versions of the poem) is created to defend the divine beings from an attack plotted by the ocean goddess Tiamat. The hero Marduk offers to save the gods only if he is appointed their supreme unquestioned leader

and is allowed to remain so even after the threat passes. The gods agree to Marduk's terms. Marduk challenges Tiamat to combat and destroys her. He then rips her corpse into two halves with which he fashions the earth and the skies. Marduk then creates the calendar, organizes the planets, stars and regulates the moon, sun, and weather. The gods pledge their allegiance to Marduk and he creates Babylon as the terrestrial counterpart to the realm of the gods. Marduk then destroys Tiamat's husband, Kingu using his blood to create humankind so that they can do the work of the gods.

(Sources, Foster, B.R., *From Distant Days : Myths, Tales, and Poetry of Ancient Mesopotamia*. 1995, Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press. vi, 438 p., Bottéro, J., *Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia*. 2004, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. x, 246 p., Jacobsen, T., *The Treasures of Darkness : A History of Mesopotamian Religion*. 1976, New Haven: Yale University Press. 273.)

- b. How this thinking of their gods reflected in behaviour of Nebuchadnezzar and the people in Daniel 3
  - 1) The gods are arrogant, violent, threatening, enslaving of people; Nebuchadnezzar's behaviour is the same.
  - 2) The realm of the gods was to be reflected in the earthly kingdom of Babylon; Nebuchadnezzar seeks to reflect Marduk's (i.e. Bel's) desire to be the "supreme unquestioned leader."
  - 3) The people felt enslaved; notice the repetition of their behaviours that modeled this attitude of enslavement.

#### **4. The freedom of Daniel's three friends, Shadrach (i.e. Hananiah), Meshach (i.e. Mishael), and Abednego (i.e. Azariah)**

- a. Others witnessed what they thought about God: some of the astrologers (3:8-12, 24-30).
- b. They speak of this freedom (3:16-18).
- c. What did they believe about God that led to their freedom?
  - 1) The freedom of God's grace (Hananiah = The Lord shows grace)
  - 2) The freedom of God's help (Azariah = The Lord helps)
  - 3) The freedom of knowing "Who is what God is" (Mishael = "Who is what God is")

#### **5. Questions to consider**

- a. If what we think about God is the most important thing about us and is what people witness about us, what feeds what we think about God?
- b. If we become like the gods we think about, why not think about Jesus, the One who alone can lead us into the joy-filled freedom for which God created you?
  - 1) Jesus perfectly reveals the Most High God.
  - 2) Jesus pays the penalty for our sin that holds us captive.
  - 3) Jesus conquered the final result of our slavery, death, so that we might live the eternal life of freedom in him for which we are designed.
  - 4) Jesus invites us into a relationship of fellowship with triune God.

## **For Further Study**

1. In Galatians 5:1, 13-25, Paul writes of the stark contrast between the freedom to which Christ calls us and empowers us to live by the Holy Spirit and the slavery in which the flesh wants to bind those who belong to Christ. Read this section and consider the differences between the life of freedom in Christ and the life of slavery to the flesh. Also, note the power that is available in Christ to choose to live in the freedom he purchased for those who belong to him.
2. Read again the Babylonian Creation Myth and see ways this concept of their gods is evident in the actions and thoughts of Nebuchadnezzar and his people in Daniel 3.
3. Look at the expressions of freedom displayed by Daniel's three friends; what are other expressions of freedom you witness from this story that life in Christ affirms and grows?
4. From your reflections, what have you learned about the authority of Christ, our king, while living in earthly kingdoms?

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### **Daniel 3 (NIV 2011)**

<sup>1</sup> King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. <sup>3</sup> So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

<sup>4</sup> Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: <sup>5</sup> As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

<sup>8</sup> At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. <sup>9</sup> They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! <sup>10</sup> Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, <sup>11</sup> and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. <sup>12</sup> But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

<sup>13</sup> Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us<sup>[c]</sup> from Your Majesty’s hand. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

<sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

<sup>24</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”

They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.”

<sup>25</sup> He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

<sup>26</sup> Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, <sup>27</sup> and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

<sup>28</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.