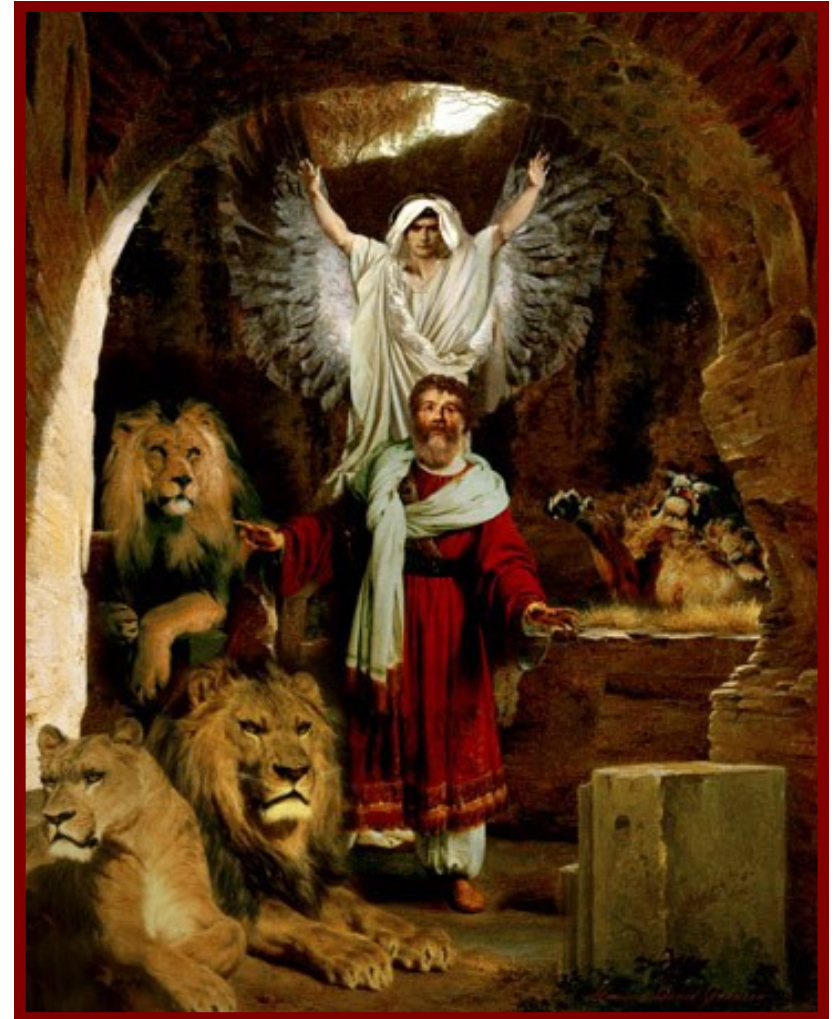


# The Book of Daniel

## Chapter 3



The Book of Daniel, as it now stands in the ordinary Hebrew Bibles, is generally divided into two main parts. The first includes a series of narratives which are told in the third person and the second, a series of visions which are described in the first person. From its content it readily appears that the Book of Daniel does not have as its objective a summary historical account of the period of the Babylonian Exile, or of the life of Daniel himself. The contents of the Prophecy of Daniel are of a peculiar kind which has no exact parallel in the Bible, except in the Apocalypse of St. John.

Commentary of the Book of Daniel is by Saint Jerome. St. Jerome, who was born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, and is the most learned of the Fathers of the Western Church. The Church regards him as the greatest of all the doctors in clarifying the Divine Word. While at Rome he made a revision of the current Latin New Testament, and of the Psalms. Then he undertook to translate most of the books of the Old Testament directly from the Hebrew. The only parts of the Latin Bible, now known as the Vulgate, which were not either translated or worked over by him are the Books of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two Books of the Maccabees. In the sixteenth century the great Council of Trent pronounced Jerome's Vulgate the authentic and authoritative Latin text of the Catholic Church, without, however, thereby implying a preference for it above the original text or above versions in other languages. In 1907 Pope Pius X entrusted to the Benedictine Order the office of restoring as far as possible the correct text of St. Jerome's Vulgate, which during fifteen centuries of use had naturally become altered in many places. The Bible now ordinarily used by English-speaking Catholics is a translation of the Vulgate, made at Rheims and Douay towards the end of the sixteenth century, and revised by Bishop Challoner in the eighteenth century. The Confraternity Edition of the New Testament appearing in 1950 represents a complete revision.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Chapter 3

Verse 1. *"Nebuchadnezzar the king made a golden statue seventy cubits in height and six cubits in breadth."* How soon he forgot the truth, when he had just been worshipping a servant of God as if he had been God Himself, but now commanded a statue to be made for himself in order that he personally might be worshipped in the statue. Now if this statue was of gold, and was of incalculable weight, it was intended to arouse amazement in the beholders and to be worshipped as God even though a mere inanimate object, whilst everyone would be consecrating his own avarice to it. On the other hand an opportunity of salvation was afforded to the barbarian nations through the opportune presence of the captive Jews (Col. iii), with the result that after they had first come to know the power of the one true God through Daniel's revelation of the dream, they might then learn from the brave example of the three youths to despise death [variant: might learn that death ought to be despised], and to eschew the worship of idols.

Verse 95 (=28). " *Blessed be God (the Vulgate has "their God, namely") of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Who hath sent His angel and rescued His servants who believed in Him. . . .* " The person whom he had previously called a son of God he here calls an angel, even though he had in the preceding passage described him as similar to a son of God rather than to God Himself. A second time, therefore, Nebuchadnezzar resumes a confession of faith in God, and as he condemns idols he praises the three youths who refused to serve or worship any god but their own God. Moreover he marvels that the fire was unable to affect the saints of God, for he says:

Verse 96 (=29). "*I have therefore determined upon this decree (the Vulgate says: "have appointed this decree"): that any people, tribe or tongue which utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall utterly perish and his house shall be laid waste. For there is no other God who can save after such a fashion.*" " Some authorities very wrongly apply this to the devil himself, asserting that in the consummation at the end of the world even the devil himself will receive a knowledge of God and will exhort all men to repent. These persons would have it that this is the king of Nineveh who finally descends from his proud throne and attains to the rewards of humility.

Verse 97 (=30). "*Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to honor in the province of Babylon.*" Those commentators who say that the three youths were previously not judges set over the provinces but mere overseers of individual government agencies in Babylon, would have it that they were now appointed as judges over the provinces.

### End of Chapter 3

"*And he set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.*" Instead of "Dura" Theodotion has "Deira," and Symmachus has "Durau," whereas the Septuagint renders it as the common noun *peribolon*, a word which we might render as "game-preserve" or "enclosure."

Verse 2. "*Nebuchadnezzar sent therefore to the satraps, magistrates and judges, the dukes and potentates, and the prefects and all the princes of the various districts that they should gather themselves together.*" It is the higher ranks which stand in the greater peril, and those who occupy the loftier position are the more sudden in their fall. The princes are assembled to worship the statue in order that through their princes the nations also might be attracted into error, For those who possess riches and power are all the more easily overthrown because of their apprehension of being bereft of them. But after the magistrates are led astray, the subject populace perish through the evil example of their superiors.

Verses 4, 5. "*And a herald proclaimed with mighty voice: 'To us the order is given, both peoples and tribes and languages, at what hour ye hear the sound of the trumpet. . . .*" Not that the entire population of all the nations could have gathered on the plain of Dura and adored the golden statue, but rather, in the person of their leaders, all the tribes and peoples were supposed to have performed the act of worship. Now as I mentally run through all the Holy Scripture, I nowhere find (unless my memory fails me) a passage stating that any of the saints worshipped God Himself by falling prostrate [actually there are many instances; cf. Brown-Driver-Briggs *Hebrew Lexicon*, 1005]; but only someone worshipping idols or demons or forbidden objects is said to have worshipped by falling prostrate. So also in this present instance that kind of worship is performed not once but several times as well. Moreover in the Gospel the devil says to the Lord, "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou fallest down and worshipping me" (Matt. 4:9). But this comment should also be made, that all heretics who devise a false doctrine with the brilliance of worldly eloquence, fashion thereby a golden statue, and to the best of their ability constrain men by their persuasiveness to fall down and adore the idol of deceit.

Verse 7. "*After these things the people, therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the trumpet and pipe....*" We are to take this statement in the same sense as above, so that we understand that all the peoples were represented by their leaders. For of course it was impossible for all the nations to attend at one time.

Verse 8. *"And straightway at that time there came certain Chaldeans and accused the Jews...."* They were envious of these Jews because they had been in charge of the king's business in Babylon, and also they were offended by their foreign religion and aversion towards idols. They therefore find a pretext for accusing them to the king. The final consequence ensues.

Verse 12. *"Now then, there are certain Jews whom thou hast appointed over the affairs of the district of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who have despised thy decree"* (the Vulgate reads: "those men of thine have despised the decree, O king"). To a certain extent their statement amounts to this: "Those captives and slaves whom thou hast preferred before us and hast made to be governors have lifted themselves up in pride and despise thine orders, not serving thy gods, and not worshipping the golden statue thou hast set up." The assertion we made at the commencement of the commentary on the vision is more abundantly proved in this passage, namely that the gods of Nebuchadnezzar were not to be identified with the golden statue which he had ordered to be erected for the worship of himself, for in what follows the king himself says:

Verse 14. *"Do ye not serve my gods, and do you not worship the golden statue which I have set up? . . ."* Other authorities assert that it is the custom of Holy Scripture to speak of the one and same idol in the plural, just like the verse in Exodus concerning the calf: "These are thy gods, O Israel, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:4). Also in the Book of Kings, where Jeroboam is establishing the golden calf in Bethel, he is said to have fashioned idols (I Kings 12). On the other hand a plurality of demons are addressed in the singular number, as in Isaiah: "He bows himself down and worships it, and as he makes his vow he says, 'Thou art my God!'" (Isa. 44:17).

Verse 15. *"Prostrate yourselves and worship the statue I have made."* Although he had up to this point given the youths his orders in angry fashion, yet he gives them room for a change of heart, so that their previous guilt might be pardoned if only they should fall down and worship. But if they should not deign to offer worship, the punishment of the fiery furnace lay at hand.

*"And what God is there who shall rescue you from my hand?..."* Why naturally, that same God whose servant thou didst just recently worship and Whom thou didst assert to be truly God of gods and Lord of kings.

Verse 16. *"King Nebuchadnezzar, we ought not to render thee answer concerning this matter."* In the Hebrew [i.e., Chaldee] original there is no vocative "King" as there is in the Septuagint, lest they should seem to address the ungodly man with servile flattery or to term him a king who was trying to force them to wickedness. But if it be contended that the reading, "O king!" should be included, then we may say that the youths were not impudently challenging the king to shed their blood but rendering him due honor so as to avoid injury to the true religion of God. But as for their statement. "We ought not to render thee answer concerning this matter," the meaning is: "Thou hast no need to hear words from men whose bravery and firmness

Verses 91, 92 (=24, 25). *"Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and hastily arose and said to his nobles: 'Did we not cast three men in shackles into the midst of the fire?'"* After the princes have been punished, the king is rebuked, in order that he may glorify God while still alive. But he questions his nobles, by whose accusation and plot he had cast the three youths into the fiery furnace, so that when they reply that they had cast three youths into the furnace, he might announce and show forth to them (what had happened).

*"And they said to the king in reply, 'Truly, O king!' The king answered (the Vulgate omits "the king"): 'Behold, I see four men unbound and walking about in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt, and the appearance of the fourth man is the likeness of a son of God.' "* Let me say again, how wise was the fire and how indescribable the power of God! Their bodies had been bound with chains; those chains were burnt up, whereas the bodies themselves were not burnt. As for the appearance of the fourth man, which he asserts to be like that of a son of God, either we must take him to be an angel, as the Septuagint has rendered it, or indeed, as the majority think, the Lord our Savior. Yet I do not know how an ungodly king could have merited a vision of the Son of God. On that reasoning one should follow Symmachus, who has thus interpreted it: "But the appearance of the fourth is like unto the sons," not unto the sons of God but unto gods themselves. We are to think of angels here, who after all are very frequently called gods as well as sons of God. So much for the story itself. But as for its typical significance, this angel or son of God foreshadows our Lord Jesus Christ, who descended into the furnace of hell, in which the souls of both sinners and of the righteous were imprisoned, in order that He might without suffering any scorching by fire or injury to His person deliver those who were held imprisoned by the chains of death.

Verse 93 (=26). *"Then Nebuchadnezzar approached unto the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and said: 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come forth and draw near!' And straightway Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came forth from the midst of the fire."* Being terrified with fear, the king does not address his request to the youths through any messengers, but himself calls upon them by name, addressing them as servants of the Most High God, and begging these very men to come forth whom he himself had cast bound into the furnace.

Verse 46. *"And the king's servants who had cast them in did not cease to make the furnace hot with naphtha and pitch."* Sallust in his histories writes that naphtha is a kind of tinder in use among the Persians which furnishes the utmost encouragement to fires. Others are of the opinion that naphtha is the name applied to olive-pits which are thrown away when the dregs of the oil have dried up. In the same way, they assert, the Greek term *pyrine* is derived from its property of nourishing *pyr*, that is, "fire".

Verse 49. *"But the angel of the Lord came down into the furnace with Azariah and his companions, and he smote the flame of the fire out of the furnace. ..."* When the soul is oppressed with tribulation and taken up with various vexations, having lost hope of human aid and turned with its whole heart to God, an angel of the Lord descends to it. That is to say, the supernatural being descends to the aid of the servant and dashes aside the fierce heat of the violent flames, that the fiery shafts of the enemy utterly fail to pierce the inner citadel of our heart and we escape being shut up in his fiery furnace.

Verses 57, 58. *"All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord; laud Him and highly exalt Him forever. Praise Him, ye angels of the Lord; laud Him and highly exalt Him. ..."* Having prefaced with general terms of praise, to the effect that every creature ought to praise the Lord, he addresses his exhortation in what follows to the various individual orders of creation: to the angels, the heavens, the waters and nature-forces, the sun and the moon, the rain-cloud and the dew, the wind, the fire and the billow, the cold and the heat, and all the rest too lengthy to include, so that he summons springs also and the seas, the sea-monsters and the birds, the beasts and flocks, to the praise of the Lord. He summons also the sons of men, and after the human race in general he specifies the race of Israel in particular, and of the Israelites themselves the priests and servants of the Lord, and the spirits and souls of the righteous, and those who are holy and of humble heart. And at the very last he specifies Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, who are summoned to praise the Lord for His present kindness. But all creation praises God not in word but in deed, inasmuch as the Creator is logically apprehended on the basis of His creatures, and in the various works and affections [unless *affectibus* be a misprint for *effectibus*: "operations"] the grandeur of God is made manifest.

Verse 87. *"Bless Him, ye saints and humble of heart...."* We are taught to have humbleness of heart both by this present verse and also by the statement in the Gospel: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Matt. 11:29). But this humbleness of heart is the same thing as is elsewhere called poverty in spirit, so that we are not to be lifted up in pride or seek after glory by a pretended humility, but rather that we abase ourselves with our whole heart. Up to this point we have mentioned but briefly a few things from Theodotion's edition, since the confession and the praises of the three youths are passages not contained in the Hebrew. But from this point on we shall follow the authentic Hebrew itself.

thou wilt presently test by actual deeds."

Verse 17. *"For behold, our God whom we serve is able to rescue us from the furnace of burning fire and to free us from thy hands, O king!"* Where he had imagined he was frightening mere youths, he perceives in them a nature of manly courage. Nor do they speak of deliverance as delayed to the distant future, but rather they promise themselves immediate succor, asserting, "For behold, our God whom we serve is the One who is able to free us both from the fearsome flames thou threatenest and from thy hands."

Verse 18. *"But if He does not will to do so"----a* phrasing which admirably avoids the idea, "If He is not able," which would be inconsistent with what they had just asserted, "He is able to deliver us" ---- but rather they say, "If He does not will to do so." Thereby they indicate that it will not be a matter of God's inability but rather of His sovereign will if they do perish.

*"Be it known to thee, O king, that we do not serve thy gods and do not worship the golden statue which thou hast set up."* Whether we wish to read "statue" as Symmachus does, or "golden image" as the other authorities have rendered it, those who reverence God are not to worship it. Therefore let judges and princes who worship the statues of emperors or idols realize that they are doing precisely the thing which the three youths refused to do and thereby pleased God. And we should observe the proper significance of the issue involved: they assert that worshipping the mere image is equivalent to serving the false gods themselves, neither of which things is befitting to the servants of God.

Verse 19. *"Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and the aspect of his countenance was wholly altered."* In certain Psalms the titles contain the notation; "On behalf of those who are to be wholly altered." [This is a literal rendering of the Septuagint's erroneous translation of the Hebrew title '*al shoshanni'm*, which occurs in Psalm 45 and Psalm 69, and signifies: "Upon anemones."] And so the expression "wholly altered" is ambiguous, comprising both the idea of change for the worse or change for the better. Now of course the alteration of Nebuchadnezzar's visage cannot be reconciled with a favorable sense. And after all there are some authorities who refer even the Psalm-titles to a change for the worse, on the ground that those who by nature have known God have been changed by the vexation and fury of their mind to a position of hostility towards Christ and His saints.

Verse 20. *"And he gave orders that the furnace be fired to sevenfold intensity beyond its usual temperature, and he commanded the strongest men in his army to bind the legs of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and cast them into the furnace of flaming fire."* Just as if the usual fire without multiplied intensity could not have consumed the youths'

bodies! But a fury and rage which borders on madness can observe no bounds. Also he wished by the threat of intensified punishment to terrify those who seemed prepared for death.

Verse 21. *"And straightway those men, bound up in their trousers and turbans and footgear and garments, were cast into the midst of the furnace of flaming fire. ..."* Instead of *sarbal*, "trousers" [actually this word probably meant "mantle" in the Aramaic] interpreted by Symmachus as *anaxy-rides* ("trousers"), Aquila and Theodotion read simply *saraballa* rather than the corrupt reading *sarabara*. Now the shanks and shin-bones are called *saraballa* in the language of the Chaldeans [apparently erroneous information; the lexicons give only "trousers" or, preferably, "mantle"], and by extension of the same word it is applied to those articles of clothing which cover the shanks and shins, as if they were to be called "shankies" and "shinnies" (*crurales et tibiales*). "Turban," however, is a Greek word, *tiara* [actually the Aramaic is *karb<sup>e</sup>la*, "cap"] which has by usage become a Latin word also, and Virgil says of it (*Aeneid*, VII):

"Both scepter and sacred tiara."

[Since *tiara* does not appear in the Aramaic original at all, the comment upon it seems quite misleading to a public not having access to the original. Two other comments ought to be made about Jerome's treatment of this verse: a) he puts "turbans" before "footgear" (*pattish*) instead of after it as the original does; b) he has nevertheless consulted the original carefully, since he avoids the variant reading of the LXX, which latter substitutes "upon their heads" for the word "footgear."] It was, however, a kind of skull-cap used by the Persian and Chaldean races.

Verse 22. *"Then those same men who had cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were slain by the fiery flame."* Of course this meant the same men of whom it was said above, "And he commanded the strongest men in his army to bind the legs of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and cast them into the burning furnace of fire (another reading: into the furnace of flaming fire)." And so they were not any chance servants of his whom Nebuchadnezzar destroyed, but men who of all his army were strong and most ready for war. Not only was it intended that the miracle should strike terror but also that his own army might experience injury.

Verse 23. *"But these three men, (here the Vulgate inserts: "that is,") Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell fettered into the midst of the furnace of flaming fire. And they were walking about in the midst of the flames praising God and blessing the Lord. And Azariah stood and prayed after this fashion, opening his mouth in the midst of the fire and saying. ..."* It was a great miracle for men to be cast into a furnace bound and to fall headlong into the midst of the fire, only to have the bonds burn up by which they were bound, the bodies of the fettered withal remaining untouched by the timid flames. The Hebrew text goes only up to this point and the intervening passage which now follows as far as the end of the Song of the Three Youths is not contained in the Hebrew [i.e. the Aramaic]. Lest we seem to pass over it altogether, we must make a few observations.

Verse 26. *"Blessed art Thou, O Lord God of our fathers, and Thy name is to be praised and glorified forever, for Thou art just in all that Thou hast done to us"* (the Vulgate adds: "in our case"). Whenever we are oppressed by various anxieties, let us lovingly speak forth this sentiment with our whole heart, and whatever may have befallen us, let us confess that it is only right for us to endure it, that the scripture may be fulfilled *in us*: "The daughters of Judah have exulted and rejoiced in all Thy judgments, O Lord" (Ps. 96:8).

Verse 29. *"For we have sinned and acted wickedly in departing from Thee, and we have forsaken Thee in all things."* Now of course the three youths had not sinned, nor were they old enough when brought to Babylon to warrant being punished for their own faults. Consequently they were speaking as representatives of their people, in the same manner as the Apostle had to state: "For what I wish to do, that I do not; but what I do not want, that I carry into effect" (Rom 7:19), and so on with the rest of that same passage.

Verse 37. *"Forasmuch, O Lord, as we have been diminished more than all the other races and abased in all the world this day because of our sins, and have at the present time neither prince nor prophet nor leader. . ."* These verses are to be used whenever the churches suffer want (because of the sins of the people) of holy men, and of magistrates who are most learned in the law of God, and also whenever in times of persecution no sacrifice or oblation is offered up. Some authorities relate this passage to the heavenly Jerusalem, on the ground that the souls have been plunged to the earthly plane and find themselves in a place of tears and utter distress, and bewail the sins of by-gone years and the other things included in the prophetic discourse. But the Church of God has not accepted this view.

Verse 39. *"But in a contrite heart and humble spirit let us be accepted, like as in the burnt offerings of rams and bullocks...."* (cf. Ps. 51:19). On the basis of the passage before us and also on the basis of what follows: "Bless the Lord, ye spirits and souls of the righteous," and also in view of the passage in Psalms: "The sacrifice for God is an anguished spirit, a contrite and abased heart God does not despise," certain authorities would have it that there resides in man a spirit, distinct from the Holy Spirit and different from the soul itself. But they will have to work out the difficulty of how there can be said to be two substances and two inner selves in one and the same man, entirely apart from the body and from the grace of the Holy Spirit.