

THE DANIEL SERIES · PART ONE

The Fiery Furnace

The Fourth Man in the Fire

SCRIPTURE	WATCH FREE	FILM
Daniel 3:1-30	youtu.be/tZgN1kBJ1FU	About 9 minutes

Cover: a still from the film. Visuals in this series are AI-generated under the director's guidance.

A Companion Guide for Families, Groups & Students

Choose Your Track

One story, five ways in. Use one track or several. Each is complete on its own.

I **Family Study** — PAGE 3

For parents, grandparents, and kids at home. Watch together, hear the story, talk, play, and pray.

The story simply told · Questions for ages 4-7, 8-12, and teens · Activity · Memory verse · Prayer

II **Kids Ministry** — PAGE 5

For children's ministry teachers. A complete 45-60 minute lesson for grades K-5, with preschool notes.

Teacher prep · Story script · Game · Object lesson · Craft · Small groups · Take-home page for parents

III **Youth Ministry** — PAGE 9

For youth leaders. A 60-75 minute night for middle and high school students.

Hook · Leader talk · Discussion · Breakouts · Reflection · Weekly challenge · Hard questions

IV **Bible Study & Small Group** — PAGE 12

For adult small groups, classes, and Bible studies. A complete 45-60 minute session.

Leader prep · Opener · Watch · Discussion questions · Application · Prayer · Leader notes

V **Deep Dive** — PAGE 15

For teachers, preachers, and anyone who wants to dig deeper into the text.

History and culture · Structure · Commentary · Aramaic key words · Interpretive views · Christ · Further study

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Start by watching the film. Families can go straight to Track I and spread it over a few evenings. Children's and youth leaders will find ready-to-teach plans in Tracks II and III, including a take-home page for parents. Adult groups will find a complete session in Track IV, and Track V is for anyone preparing to teach or wanting to go deeper.

Above all, read the passage itself. The film and this guide are meant to send you back to Scripture, where God speaks.

WATCH THE FILM

youtu.be/tZgN1kBJ1FU
Free on YouTube · about 9 minutes

Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (WEB), current edition as published at eBible.org (public domain); older WEB printings differ in a few words. Aramaic words are cited from the original text of Daniel. This guide is free to print, copy, and share for non-commercial ministry use. Bible Stories Brought to Life · youtube.com/@BSBTLFilms

TRACK ONE

Family Study

For parents, grandparents, and kids of every age. Watch together, read the story, talk, play, and pray.



The furnace, heated "seven times more than it was usually heated" (Daniel 3:19, WEB). A still from the film.

The Story, Simply Told

Retold in simple words from Daniel 3. Words in quotation marks are paraphrased for children.

Long ago, God's people were carried away from their home in Jerusalem to the great city of Babylon. Among them were three young friends named Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In Babylon they were given new names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They served King Nebuchadnezzar well, but they still belonged to the one true God.

One day the king built a gigantic statue of gold, about as tall as a nine-story building. He called all his leaders to a wide plain and gave an order: when the music plays, everyone must bow down and worship the statue. Anyone who refuses will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

The music began. The gathered crowd bowed low. But three young men stayed standing.

The king was furious. He gave them one more chance and asked, "Who is that god who will deliver you out of my hands?" They answered calmly: our God is able to rescue us. *But even if He does not,* we will never bow to your statue.

So the king had the furnace heated seven times hotter. His strongest soldiers tied up the three friends and threw them into the fire. The flames were so hot that the soldiers themselves were killed.

Then the king jumped up in shock. "Didn't we throw in three men? I see *four* men walking around in the fire, untied and unhurt!" He called them out, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked out of the furnace. Not one hair was burned. Their clothes weren't scorched. They didn't even smell like smoke.

The king praised their God, who had sent His angel to rescue them, and said no other god could save like this.

They chose to stand before they ever saw the fourth man in the fire.

Talk Together

AGES 4-7

1. The king wanted everyone to bow to a gold statue. Who is the only one we worship?
2. How many people did the king see in the fire? Who was taking care of them?
3. When do *you* need to be brave like the three friends?

AGES 8-12

1. Why was bowing to the statue such a big deal to God? (Read Exodus 20:3-5.)
2. The friends said, "Even if God doesn't rescue us, we still won't bow." Why is that so brave?
3. When might a kid feel pushed to go along with everyone, even when it's wrong?

TEENS

1. What "golden images" are people your age expected to bow to?
2. Is it harder to stand alone in person or online? Why?
3. The three friends were respectful to the king but would not move. How can you stand firm *and* stay kind?

Try This Together

Stand Tall 2 MINUTES Play a song. When it stops, someone calls out a real choice, such as *"Tell the truth when a lie would be easier!"* Everyone stands up straight and says together, **"I will stand!"** Take turns calling out choices from your family's week.

The Fire Picture 10 MINUTES Draw a furnace with orange and red flames and *four* figures walking inside. On the flames, write or draw things that feel scary to your family. Across the top, write **"God is with me"** (see Isaiah 43:2, God's promise to be with His people in hard times). Hang it on the fridge this week and pray over it at dinner.

MEMORY VERSE

"...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us..."

DANIEL 3:17, WEB

Older kids and teens: learn all of Daniel 3:17-18.

A FAMILY PRAYER

Dear God, You are the only true God, and You are able to do anything. Help us to stand for You when it is hard, even when everyone else goes along. Thank You that You are with us when we are scared, just as You were with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Thank You for Jesus, who promised never to leave us. In His name we pray, amen.

TRACK TWO

Kids Ministry

A complete 45-60 minute lesson for elementary classes (about grades K-5), with notes for preschool and a take-home page for parents.

THE BIG IDEA

God is with me, so I can stand for Him, even when it's hard.

LESSON PLAN

	45 MIN	60 MIN
Welcome and opening game	8	10
Bible story (told or film)	10	12
Object lesson	5	6
Craft	10	15
Small groups	7	10
Memory verse	3	4
Prayer and goodbye	2	3

THE STORY IN PLAIN WORDS

God's people had been carried far from home to the city of Babylon. Three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, served King Nebuchadnezzar well, but they worshiped only God. The king set up a gold statue about as tall as a nine-story building and ordered everyone to bow down to it. The three friends would not. They were thrown into a blazing furnace, and the king saw *four* people walking in the fire. God was with them, and they came out unhurt.

READ BEFORE CLASS

Daniel 3, the whole chapter. Read verses 16-18 and 25-28 twice. If you will show the film, watch it all the way through first.

What Kids May Ask

"Did the soldiers die?" Yes. The fire killed the men who threw the friends in (3:22). Say it once, calmly, without detail: *The fire was very dangerous, and that shows how amazing God's protection was.* With preschoolers, leave it out.

"Who was the fourth man?" The king said he looked "like a son of the gods" (3:25), and later said God "sent his angel" (3:28). Christians understand him as an angel or as God's Son appearing before He was born as a baby. For kids: *Someone from God was right there. God was with them in the fire.*

"Will God always keep me from getting hurt?" Don't promise that hard things won't happen. Say: *God doesn't always stop hard things, but He is always with us* (Matthew 28:20). **Add a safety rule:** a real fire means get out and tell a grown-up.

"Is bowing bad?" Not always. In many families and cultures, bowing is a way to show respect to a person. But God's law says not to bow down to images to worship or serve them (Exodus 20:4-5), and that is what the king commanded.

Kids from other backgrounds. Keep the focus on loving and trusting God, not on who is "bad." Standing for God means saying no to what is wrong, kindly.

Telling the Story

YOU'LL NEED a gold-colored towel or a yellow paper tower for the statue, a paper crown, and something to play music on. *SAY lines are a dramatized paraphrase for children; READ lines quote the WEB.*

DO Put on the crown and stand tall, feet on the floor, beside the "statue."

SAY I am King Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful king in the world! I built this giant gold statue. When the music plays, everybody must bow down and worship it, or into the fire you go!

DO Play a few seconds of music. Three volunteers stay standing while everyone else crouches low.

SAY The gathered crowd bowed low. But three young men stood tall: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They served in the king's government and did good work for him, but they would worship only God.

READ Daniel 3:17-18 from your Bible, slowly. Then ask: *What did they say God was able to do? What did they say they would do, even if God didn't rescue them?*

SAY The king was so angry that his face changed. He had the furnace made seven times hotter. Soldiers tied up the three friends and threw them in.

SAY *(Pause. Hold up four fingers.)* Then the king jumped up. "Look, I see four men loose, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are unharmed." (3:25) When the friends came out, not one hair was burned, and they didn't even smell like smoke! The king said their God was the God who rescues.

ASK Who was with the friends in the fire? Who is with *you* when you're scared?

USING THE FILM INSTEAD. Grades 3-5: show 1:05 to 7:27, the whole story. Grades K-2: show 5:28 to 7:27 ("The Fourth Man" and "Out of the Fire"). Times are from the video's YouTube chapters. Preview first: the narration between 4:45 and 5:28 says the fire killed the soldiers.

Opening Game: The King Says

Play it like *Simon Says*. A leader wears the crown and gives commands: *The king says hop on one foot. The king says touch your nose.* Every so often, the king gives a wrong command: *The king says tell a lie!* or *The king says bow down to my statue!* When that happens, everyone stands tall, crosses their arms, and says **"We won't!"** Nobody sits out. If someone follows a wrong command, pause and briefly explain why it was wrong, then keep playing.

Wrap up: *Today we'll meet three friends who obeyed the king in lots of things, but when he told them to do something wrong, they stood tall.*

Object Lesson: Four in the Fire

YOU'LL NEED a shoebox turned on its side, red, orange, and yellow tissue paper, a flashlight, and four clothespins or paper figures (make one of them gold).

Tuck tissue-paper "flames" inside the shoebox. Shine the flashlight through it from behind so it glows. Stand three figures inside. Ask: *How many friends were thrown in?* Then quietly slide in the gold figure. Ask: *How many did the king see?*

Say: *God didn't keep them out of the fire. He met them in the fire. When you are scared or sad, you are not alone. God is with you.*
Do not use real flames or candles.

Craft: My Four-in-the-Fire Plate

Kids tear flame shapes and glue them around the plate. Then they glue on four "people" and color one of them gold or white. Across the top, a leader or older child writes **God is with me**. Older kids can add Jesus' promise on the back: "I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:20).

SUPPLIES (PER CHILD)

- A paper plate
- Red, orange, and yellow paper scraps or tissue squares
- A glue stick
- Crayons or markers
- Four craft sticks or paper strips for the people

Small Groups

GRADES K-2

1. What part of the story did you like best? Why?
2. How do you think the three friends felt when everyone else bowed down?
3. What do you think the king thought when he saw four people in the fire?
4. Tell about a time you felt scared. How does it help to know God is with you?

GRADES 3-5

1. Why wouldn't the three friends bow? (Read Exodus 20:3.)
2. They said God was able to save them, "But if not..." What does that show about how much they trusted Him?
3. When do kids your age feel pushed to go along with the crowd?
4. How can you stand for God and still be kind and respectful?

Memory Verse Practice

MEMORY VERSE

"...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us..."

DANIEL 3:17, WEB

Stand-Up Verse: each child stands on their word and sits down after it. Then say it faster, then whisper it, then shout it. Grades 3-5 can add all of 3:17-18.

Prayer

Invite kids to pray "popcorn" style. Anyone who wants to finishes this sentence out loud: *God, help me stand for You when...* Then close: *God, You are the only true God. Thank You for being with us when we're scared. Help us stand for You and be kind. In Jesus' name, amen.*

CLASSROOM TIPS

- **Attention signal:** say "Stand tall!" and everyone freezes, straight and quiet. Practice it once.
- **Give wiggly kids a job:** holding the crown or the flashlight.
- If a child is upset about the fire, talk quietly and tell their parent at pickup. No real flames, candles, or lighters, ever.
- **Safeguarding.** If a child or teen tells you about abuse, neglect, self-harm, harmful drinking or drug use at home, or anything else that makes you worried for their safety: stay calm, listen, and thank them for telling you. Don't promise to keep it secret, don't question them for details or investigate, and don't confront anyone involved. Write down what they said as soon as you can, and report it the same day to your church's designated safeguarding lead, following your church's safeguarding policy and any mandatory-reporting law that applies to you. If anyone is in immediate danger, stay with them and call emergency services. Telling a church safeguarding lead does not replace any report the law requires you to make directly to child-protection authorities or police.

FOR PRESCHOOL (AGES 3-5)

- Plan for 20-25 minutes: story, game, a pre-cut craft, and prayer.
- Tell the story with four figures and leave out the soldiers.
- Keep questions to pointing and yes-or-no: *Show me how many people were in the fire.*
- Repeat a simple phrase together, such as *God is with me.* (That is a summary, not a verse.)

TAKE-HOME PAGE · FOR PARENTS

Today in Kids Ministry

The Fiery Furnace

DANIEL 3

WHAT WE LEARNED

Three young men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would not bow down to a king's gold statue, even when he threatened them with a fiery furnace. God was with them in the fire, and they came out unharmed. **Big idea:** *God is with me, so I can stand for Him, even when it's hard.*

TALK ON THE WAY HOME

1. What do you remember most about the story?
2. How do you think the three friends felt when they kept standing?
3. When is it hard for you to do the right thing?

MEMORY VERSE

"...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us..."

DANIEL 3:17, WEB

TRY THIS AT HOME

At dinner, play "Stand Tall." Someone names a real choice from the week, such as *telling the truth when a lie would be easier.* Everyone stands up and says, *I will stand!*

Watch the film together

Scan, or visit youtu.be/tZgN1kBJ1FU. Free on YouTube, about 9 minutes. Parents, please preview it first: the narration says the soldiers died in the fire (no graphic violence is shown).

GO DEEPER AS A FAMILY

The **Family Study** track of this companion guide, on page 3, has the story in simple words, questions for ages 4-7, 8-12, and teens, a family activity, and a prayer.

PRAY TOGETHER

God, thank You that You are always with us. Help our family stand for You, kindly and bravely. In Jesus' name, amen.

KIDS: DRAW THE FOUR PEOPLE WALKING IN THE FIRE

TRACK THREE

YOUTH MINISTRY

A 60-75 minute youth night for middle and high school students: a hook, a talk, discussion, breakouts, and a challenge for the week.

THE BIG IDEA

Everyone bows to something. Will you bow to whatever the crowd worships, or stand with the God who stands with you in the fire?

NIGHT PLAN

	60 MIN	75 MIN
Arrival and hook	10	12
Watch the film	9	9
Leader talk	15	18
Large-group discussion	8	10
Small-group breakouts	12	16
Reflection	4	6
Challenge and prayer	2	4

THE HOOK: THE LINE TEST

Announce a peer-pressure role-play. Three or four volunteers agree to answer first and confidently pick the *wrong* one of two clearly different lines; then ask everyone else, one by one. Anyone may pass. Debrief without singling anyone out: *What did it feel like to disagree with the group?*

It echoes a well-known set of experiments by psychologist Solomon Asch in the 1950s. Many participants went along with a group's obviously wrong answer at least some of the time.

Low-prep option: *This or That.* Students move to one side of the room or the other: *the only one standing, or the only one sitting? Loud and wrong, or quiet and right?*

LEADER TALK

1 **EVERYONE BOWS TO SOMETHING.** When the music played, the gathered people bowed (3:7). Our music is different: notifications, trends, the group chat, the pressure to look a certain way. Good things become idols when we give them the trust, loyalty, and worth that belong to God alone. That might be approval, appearance, grades, a sport, or a relationship. Ask: *What gets your first thought in the morning and your last at night?*

2 **THEY KNEW WHO THEY WERE.** Babylon gave these young men new names (1:6-7), a new education, and a new future. It could rename them, but it couldn't rename their hearts. You will be labeled too, online and in the hallway. Your identity comes from the God who made you, not from the crowd that rates you.

3 **"BUT IF NOT."** Read 3:17-18. Their faith wasn't a deal: *God, rescue me and I'll stay loyal.* It was trust in who God is, whatever happened next. Following Jesus sometimes costs something real. It might mean being the one who won't forward the photo, who sits with the person everyone mocks, or who won't cheat when everyone else does.

4 **COURAGE WITHOUT CONTEMPT.** They called him "O king." They didn't insult him or start a riot, and they didn't move. You can disagree without humiliating anyone, online or off. Conviction and kindness belong together.

5 **THE FOURTH MAN IN THE FIRE.** They weren't kept *from* the fire. They were met *in* it (3:25). This is the heart of the gospel: Jesus did not avoid suffering. He "humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, yes, the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). He has said, "I will in no way leave you, neither will I in any way forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

6 **FAITHFULNESS IS LOUD.** Three people's quiet refusal ended with a king praising their God (3:28). Your consistency speaks louder than you think.

DISCUSSION

MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. What were the three friends being pressured to do? What would it have cost them to say no?
2. Where do people your age feel the most pressure to go along: in person, in group chats, or on social media?
3. What does "But if not" mean in your own words?
4. Who has stood up *for* you before? What did it mean to you?

HIGH SCHOOL

1. What are the "golden images" our culture expects everyone to bow to?
2. Is it possible to follow God only as long as He gives you what you want? What does 3:17-18 say about that kind of faith?
3. Where is the line between respecting authority and refusing to obey it (compare Acts 5:29)?
4. How can you hold a conviction without contempt for people who disagree?

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. What part of the film or the talk hit you most? Why?
2. Finish this sentence honestly: *The thing I'm most tempted to bow to right now is…*
3. What would it actually look like for you to "stand" this week, specifically?
4. How can this group help you do it?

REFLECTION: TWO OPTIONS

Phones down. Hand out index cards. Each student writes: *God is able to _____. But if not, I will _____.* They fold it and keep it in a wallet or phone case.

Phones out (no social media). Have students open their notes app and write the same sentence. If they choose, they can privately check their screen-time totals; never ask anyone to show a screen or name an app. Ask: *What tends to get your attention first?* Optional: set a daily reminder with "Daniel 3:17-18."

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

NAME IT. STAND ONCE. TELL SOMEONE.

Name one thing you're tempted to bow to. Choose one specific moment this week to stand, kindly. Then tell a leader or a friend from this group how it went.

LEADER NOTES ON HARD QUESTIONS

"WHY DID GOD SAVE THEM BUT NOT OTHER BELIEVERS?" Be honest: He doesn't always rescue in this life. The three men knew that ("But if not…" 3:18). Hebrews 11 lists people who "quenched the power of fire" (11:34) next to others who were tortured and killed (11:35-38). God promises His presence and final rescue, not escape from every trial (Romans 8:38-39).

"WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?" Don't rush to a neat answer. Jesus said, "In the world you have trouble; but cheer up! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Christians believe God didn't stay distant from suffering: He entered it in Jesus, and He will one day set everything right.

"WAS IT FAIR THAT THE SOLDIERS DIED?" The text puts the blame on the king's rage and rushed order (3:22), not on God. The story shows how dangerous and cruel unchecked power can be.

"DID THIS REALLY HAPPEN?" Nebuchadnezzar is a well-documented king of Babylon. No record of this event outside the Bible is known. Christians believe God can act in miraculous ways, and for most the deepest reason is the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). Christians also hold different views on when Daniel was written (see the Deep Dive, page 15). Welcome the question; doubt voiced honestly is a step toward faith, not away from it.

SAFEGUARDING. If a child or teen tells you about abuse, neglect, self-harm, harmful drinking or drug use at home, or anything else that makes you worried for their safety: stay calm, listen, and thank them for telling you. Don't promise to keep it secret, don't question them for details or investigate, and don't confront anyone involved. Write down what they said as soon as you can, and report it the same day to your church's designated safeguarding lead, following your church's safeguarding policy and any mandatory-reporting law that applies to you. If anyone is in immediate danger, stay with them and call emergency services. Telling a church safeguarding lead does not replace any report the law requires you to make directly to child-protection authorities or police.

PRAYER

Ask students to pray silently: *God, show me what I bow to.* Then close: *Lord, You alone are worthy of worship. Give us courage that stays kind, and faith that holds on even if the answer is "not yet" or "no." Thank You, Jesus, that You are with Your people in every fire. Amen.*

TRACK FOUR

Bible Study & Small Group

A complete session for small groups, classes, and Bible studies, with leader preparation and notes. Plan on 45 to 60 minutes.

Leader Preparation

THE BIG IDEA

God is able to deliver His people. But even if He does not, He alone is worthy of our worship, and He does not abandon His people in the fire.

> *"If it happens, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."*
>
> DANIEL 3:17-18, WEB

BACKGROUND

- **Setting.** Babylon during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 BC). Jerusalem's leading young men had been taken into exile (Daniel 1:1-7).
- **The men.** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are the Babylonian court names of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (1:6-7). Nebuchadnezzar had appointed them over the affairs of the province of Babylon (2:49).
- **The image.** Sixty cubits high and six wide, roughly 90 by 9 feet (3:1). The text does not say whom it portrayed.
- **The issue.** God's law forbids bowing down to images to worship or serve them (Exodus 20:4-5).

SESSION PLAN

	45 MIN	60 MIN
Welcome and opener	5	8
Watch the film	10	10
Read Daniel 3:13-28	5	5
Discussion (choose 4-5)	17	25
Application and prayer	8	12

BEFORE YOU MEET

Read all of Daniel 3 twice, once straight through and once slowly. Watch the film. Read the leader notes on page 14 and decide which questions you'll prioritize if time is short.

The Session

1 **Open.** Tell us about a time you felt pressure to go along with the crowd. What made it hard to stand?

2 **Watch.** Play *The Fiery Furnace* (youtu.be/tZgN1kBJ1FU, about 9 minutes). Ask the group to notice what the three men said, and what they left unsaid.

3 **Read.** Read Daniel 3:13-28 aloud, changing readers at each paragraph.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What moment in the film stayed with you? Why?
2. The three men were exiles with new names in a foreign land. How is that like following Jesus in our culture today?
3. Read 3:16-18. They said God is able to deliver them, and that He would deliver them out of the king's hand. Then they said, "But if not..." How do you understand both statements together?
4. Why do you think "But if not..." has encouraged believers for so long? Where do you need that kind of faith right now?
5. The men answered the king respectfully, but they would not move. What does faithful, gracious courage look like for you?
6. The flames killed the soldiers who carried the men up, yet the three walked out without even the smell of fire on them (3:22, 27). What does this show about who holds real power?
7. The men were not kept *from* the fire; they were met *in* it (3:25). When life is hard, what helps you seek or remember God's presence, even when you don't feel it? Who has been that reminder for you?
8. Through three people's faithfulness, a king proclaimed their God to every people, nation, and language (3:28-29). How might your faithfulness speak to the people around you?

APPLICATION

- **Name it.** What is one "golden image" the people around you expect you to bow to: approval, money, comfort, success, a screen?
- **Say it.** Finish this sentence and share it if you can: *"God is able to _____. But even if He does not, I will _____."*
- **Do it.** Choose one quiet, concrete way to stand this week, at work, at school, or at home.

PRAYER

Thank God that He is able. Ask Him for courage to stay faithful whatever happens. Pray by name for anyone in the group who is walking through a fire right now.

Leader Notes on the Questions

Q3, "COULD" AND "WOULD." Their confidence rests on God's power and character, not on knowing the outcome in advance. Their faithfulness doesn't depend on being rescued. Compare Jesus in Gethsemane (Luke 22:42).

Q5, RESPECT AND RESISTANCE. They address the king as king (3:16-18), and they don't insult him or plan a revolt. Their refusal is narrow: they will serve in Babylon, but they will not worship its gods. This is a helpful model for believers who live under authorities they cannot always obey (compare Jeremiah 29:7 and Acts 5:29).

Q7, THE FOURTH FIGURE. Nebuchadnezzar says the fourth "is like a son of the gods" (3:25) and later says God "sent his angel" (3:28). Christians have understood the figure in more than one way: as an angel, or as an appearance of the Son of God before His incarnation. Both views affirm the main point. God was present with His servants in the fire. Don't let the group get stuck here (see the Deep Dive, page 17).

IF SOMEONE ASKS, "DOES GOD ALWAYS RESCUE?" No, not always in this life, and the text is honest about that in "but if not." Hebrews 11 lists believers who "quenched the power of fire" (11:34) alongside others who suffered and died (11:35-38). God's presence and final deliverance are promised; escape from every trial is not.

PASTORAL CARE. Some in your group may be facing real loss or persecution. Let the passage comfort, not pressure. The point isn't "be brave enough," but "God is faithful enough."

TRACK FIVE

Deep Dive

A closer study of Daniel 3 for teachers, preachers, and anyone who wants to dig in: history, language, structure, interpretation, and Christ.

How to read this section. Statements of fact are drawn from the biblical text or from well-established historical sources. Where scholars disagree, the major views held by orthodox Christian interpreters are set side by side and labeled. Scripture is quoted from the World English Bible (WEB). Aramaic words are given in Hebrew script with a simple transliteration.

1. Historical and Cultural Background

BABYLON AND NEBUCHADNEZZAR

Nebuchadnezzar II ruled the Neo-Babylonian Empire from 605 to 562 BC.[1] In 605 BC he defeated Egypt at Carchemish and took control of the lands west of the Euphrates, including Judah. Daniel 1:1-2 dates the first exile, in which Daniel and his friends were taken, to "the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim" and describes how the Lord gave Jehoiakim into his hand "with some of the vessels of the house of God". Babylon itself was one of the greatest cities of its day, famous for its walls, the Ishtar Gate, and the great temple of Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar's own building inscriptions boast of his work, in the spirit of Daniel 4:30: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built...?"

WHEN DID DANIEL 3 HAPPEN?

The Aramaic text of Daniel 3 gives no date. The Old Greek (Septuagint) translation adds "in his eighteenth year," which would place the image around the time Jerusalem fell (587/586 BC).[2] That addition is not part of the Aramaic text, so it's best treated as an early tradition, not a firm date. The story clearly follows Daniel 2, since the three men already hold the office given to them in 2:49.

THE PLAIN OF DURA AND THE IMAGE

"Dura" has not been located with certainty. The name is related to the Akkadian word *dūru*, "wall" or "walled place," and several places in Mesopotamia bore similar names.[3] The image was sixty cubits high and six wide (3:1). At about 18 inches to the cubit, that is roughly 90 by 9 feet. Its tall, narrow proportions have led many commentators to suggest that it stood on a pedestal or was an obelisk-like pillar, and that it was gold-plated rather than solid gold (compare Isaiah 40:19). *(These are interpretations; the text says only "an image of gold".)* The text never says whether it depicted the king, a god, or something else. What matters to the narrator is that bowing to it was an act of worship (3:12, 14, 18).

THE FURNACE

The Aramaic *'attûn* (אַתּוּן) is a furnace or kiln. Many commentators suggest a brick kiln, common in Babylon's building projects, with an opening above through which the men "fell down" (3:23) and a door at ground level through which the king could see inside and call to them (3:26). *(This is a reconstruction drawn from the details of the text.)*

OFFICIALS AND INSTRUMENTS

The lists in 3:2-3 name a long series of officials. Several of the titles are Persian loanwords, beginning with the word usually translated "satraps" (WEB "local governors"). The instruments in 3:5 include three Greek loanwords, the zither, the harp, and the pipe in the WEB.[4] These loanwords play a part in the scholarly debate about when the book reached its final form (see "Dating the book" below).

WHY IS THIS CHAPTER IN ARAMAIC?

Daniel is written in two languages. Daniel 1:1-2:4a and chapters 8-12 are in Hebrew. From the middle of 2:4, where the Chaldeans answer the king "in the Syrian language" (WEB; that is, Aramaic), through 7:28, the book is in Aramaic, the international language of the Babylonian and Persian empires. Daniel 3 belongs to this Aramaic section, which addresses the nations and their kings directly.

DATING THE BOOK

Christians hold different views on when the book of Daniel was written. The traditional view holds that the book records the experiences and visions of Daniel in the sixth century BC and was written by him or soon after. This view is defended by commentators such as Edward J. Young, Joyce Baldwin, and Stephen Miller. Many modern scholars date the book's final

form to about 165 BC, during the persecution under Antiochus IV. Some evangelical scholars, such as John Goldingay, discuss a later date while affirming the book's authority. This guide follows the narrative's own setting. The message of Daniel 3 for worship and faithfulness stands either way.

2. Literary Structure

DANIEL 3 WITHIN DANIEL 2-7

The Aramaic chapters are arranged in a mirror pattern (a chiasm) that many scholars have noted since Adrien Lenglet's 1972 study:[5]

A	DANIEL 2	Four kingdoms, and the kingdom of God
B	DANIEL 3	**Faithful servants delivered from the furnace**
C	DANIEL 4	A proud king (Nebuchadnezzar) humbled
C′	DANIEL 5	A proud king (Belshazzar) judged
B′	DANIEL 6	A faithful servant delivered from the lions
A′	DANIEL 7	Four kingdoms, and the kingdom of God

Daniel 3 is thus paired with Daniel 6. Both stories show a faithful Jew who refuses to compromise in worship, a death sentence, God's deliverance, and a pagan king who praises Israel's God.

THE SHAPE OF CHAPTER 3

3:1-7	The image, the assembly, and the command to worship
3:8-12	The accusation against "certain Jews"
3:13-18	The confrontation, and the three men's confession
3:19-23	The furnace heated seven times hotter
3:24-27	Four men walking in the fire
3:28-30	The king's praise, decree, and promotion of the men

REPETITION AS A LITERARY DEVICE

The narrator repeats the list of officials (3:2, 3), the list of instruments (3:5, 7, 10, 15), and the phrase "the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up" again and again. Many commentators read this heavy repetition as deliberate, even gently satirical, portraying the empire's machinery of worship as grand, mechanical, and empty beside the simple words of three men. *(This is a literary interpretation.)*

3. Commentary

3:1-7, THE IMAGE AND THE COMMAND. The king gathers every level of his government for the dedication of his image. Whatever the image portrayed, the point was loyalty to the king and his gods made visible in one act. The penalty, "cast into the middle of a burning fiery furnace the same hour" (3:6), shows how seriously he took it. At the signal, "all the peoples, the nations, and the languages fell down and worshiped" (3:7). The phrase is repeated through Daniel, and it sets up the question of whose kingdom the nations will finally acknowledge (compare 7:14).

3:8-12, THE ACCUSATION. Some of the Chaldeans ("certain Chaldeans" in 3:8) accuse "certain Jews" (3:12), whom the king himself had promoted. The charge has three parts: they have not respected the king, they don't serve his gods, and they don't worship the image. The narrative never shows them disloyal: they hold royal office (2:49; 3:12), and their answer is respectful (3:16-18). Their refusal concerns worship. *(The text does not separately rule on the first charge; this is an interpretation.)*

3:13-15, THE KING'S CHALLENGE. In rage, Nebuchadnezzar gives them a second chance, and then asks the chapter's central question: "Who is that god who will deliver you out of my hands?" (3:15) The verb "deliver" (*šēzib*, שֵׁיזִב) recurs in 3:17 and 3:28, and the story answers his question.

3:16-18, THE CONFESSION. Their opening words are not rudeness: "...we have no need to answer you in this matter." (3:16) The words mean that the matter is settled and needs no defense. Verse 17 opens with an Aramaic phrase (*hēn ʾītay*) that translations render differently: "If it happens" (WEB), "If this be so" (ESV), or "If our God... is able" (NRSV).[6] The best-supported reading of the whole statement is not doubt about God's power, which they affirm outright, but humility about God's will. Then come the famous words, *wĕhēn lāʾ* (וְהֵן לָא), "But if not..." (3:18). Their obedience doesn't depend on the outcome.

3:19-23, THE FURNACE. The king's face is "changed" with fury (3:19). The furnace is heated "seven times more than it was usually heated", probably an idiom for "as hot as possible." The men are bound fully clothed (3:21), a detail that sets up the miracle in 3:27. The flames kill the soldiers who carry them up (3:22). The three "fell down bound into the middle of the burning fiery furnace" (3:23).

3:24-25, FOUR MEN WALKING. Startled, the king asks, "Didn't we cast three men bound into the middle of the fire?" (3:24) Now he sees four men "loose, walking in the middle of the fire" and unharmed, and the fourth looks "like a son of the gods" (3:25). The men who went in bound now walk free, and they are not alone. On the identity of the fourth, see section 5.

3:26-27, OUT OF THE FIRE. The king calls them "servants of the Most High God" (*'ĕlāhā' 'illā'āh*, אֱלָהָא עִלָּאָה). The officials who had gathered to bow to the image now gather to inspect the three men (3:27). The fire had no power over their bodies: not a hair singed, their clothes unchanged. "The smell of fire wasn't even on them." The deliverance is total.

3:28-30, THE KING'S RESPONSE. Nebuchadnezzar blesses their God, "who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him" (3:28). He credits the men with defying the king's word and yielding their bodies rather than worship any god but their own. His decree (3:29) protects their God from insult. It shows how far he has come, and also how far he still has to go: he still thinks in threats, and his own humbling comes in Daniel 4. The men are promoted (3:30). The God who "is able to deliver" (3:17) has done exactly that, "because there is no other god who is able to deliver like this" (3:29).

4. Key Words

WORD	TRANSLITERATION	MEANING AND USE
צְלֵם	*ṣĕlēm*	"image, statue" (3:1 and throughout). Related to the Hebrew *ṣelem* of Genesis 1:27: humans themselves bear God's image, so worshiping an image made by human hands as a god inverts the order of creation.†
סְגִד	*sĕgid*	"to bow down, prostrate oneself, worship" (3:5-7, 10-12, 14-15, 18, 28)
פְּלַח	*pĕlaḥ*	"to serve," especially in worship (3:12, 14, 17-18, 28). The men *serve* their God (3:17) and will not serve Babylon's gods.
אַתּוּן	*'attûn*	"furnace, kiln" (3:6, 11, 15, 17, 19-23, 26)
שֵׁיזִב	*šēzib*	"to rescue, deliver" (3:15, 17, 28). The king's question and God's answer turn on this word.
וְהֵן לָא	*wĕhēn lā'*	"but if not" (3:18)
בַּר־אֱלָהִין	*bar-'ĕlāhîn*	"a son of (the) gods" (3:25). The phrase most naturally means "a divine being," as a polytheist king would describe it. The KJV renders it "the Son of God."
מַלְאֲכֵהּ	*mal'ākēh*	"his angel, his messenger" (3:28)

† A theological connection drawn by many interpreters, not an argument made by Daniel 3 itself.

5. Interpretive Questions

WHO WAS THE FOURTH FIGURE IN THE FIRE? (3:25, 28)

The text gives us two descriptions, both from Nebuchadnezzar: "like a son of the gods" (3:25) and "his angel" (3:28).

- **View 1: An angel.** This takes the king's second statement as the text's own explanation. It fits Daniel 6:22, where Daniel says God "sent his angel" to shut the lions' mouths, and the wider biblical picture of angels as ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14).
- **View 2: The Son of God before His incarnation.** Many Christian interpreters, from the early church onward, have seen a Christophany, a visible appearance of the eternal Son, like the "angel of Yahweh" elsewhere in the Old Testament who speaks as God (for example, Exodus 3:2-6). On this reading, Christ was literally with His servants in the fire.

What both views share. God was personally present with His people in their trial and delivered them by His own power. Neither view requires reading a confession of the Trinity into a pagan king's words. Faithful Christians hold both views, and this guide does not insist on one.

WERE THEY SURE GOD WOULD DELIVER THEM? (3:17-18)

Some readers hear uncertainty in "if" and "but if not." Others stress the confidence of "he will deliver us out of your hand" (3:17). Most commentators hold both together: complete confidence in God's power and

goodness, with humble submission to His will about the outcome. The words "he will deliver us out of your hand" may also look beyond the furnace. Whatever happens, the king will not have the last word over them.

WHAT ABOUT THE LONGER GREEK VERSION?

Ancient Greek translations of Daniel include sixty-eight additional verses after 3:23, the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men. Catholic and Orthodox Bibles include them as part of Daniel, and Protestant Bibles omit them or print them with the Apocrypha. They are not part of the Aramaic text quoted in this guide.

6. Cross-References

- **Exodus 20:3-5**: no other gods, and no bowing down to idols to serve them, the command at stake.
- **Daniel 1:8-16**: Daniel resolved not to defile himself, and his three friends joined him in the test (1:11-16). Their stand in chapter 3 follows an earlier, smaller test of faithfulness.
- **Daniel 6**: the matching story in the chiasm, with Daniel and the lions.
- **Isaiah 43:2**: "When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and flame will not scorch you." (WEB) In context, God's promise to be present with Israel through exile and trial (43:1-3), not a guarantee that His people will never be hurt.
- **Psalm 46:1**: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." (WEB)
- **Acts 5:29**: "We must obey God rather than men." (WEB)
- **Hebrews 11:33-38**: by faith some "quenched the power of fire..." and others suffered and died. Both were faithful.
- **1 Peter 1:6-7**: faith tested by fire, "more precious than gold that perishes".
- **Revelation 13:15**: an image, a demand for worship, and a death penalty. Daniel 3's pattern echoes at the end of the Bible.

7. How Daniel 3 Points to Christ

The faithful worshiper. Satan once offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world "if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus answered, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him only." (Matthew 4:9-10, WEB) Where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood firm on the plain of Dura, Jesus stood perfectly faithful for us.

A Gospel Parallel. In Gethsemane Jesus prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (Luke 22:42, WEB) The three men went into the fire and were preserved in it. Jesus was not spared the cross. He went into death bearing our sin (Isaiah 53:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21) and rose again on the third day.

God with us in the fire. Whatever view one holds of the fourth figure, Daniel 3 shows the God who comes near to His suffering people. That presence reaches its fullness in Jesus, Immanuel, who promises, "I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:20, WEB), and through whom nothing "will be able to separate us from God's love which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:39, WEB).

Bound in, free out. The men went into the fire bound and walked in it loose. Those who belong to Christ are not promised escape from every fire, but they are promised that the fire will not have the last word.

8. For Further Study

COMMENTARIES (ACCESSIBLE) - DALE RALPH DAVIS, *THE MESSAGE OF DANIEL*, THE BIBLE SPEAKS TODAY (IVP, 2013). - IAIN M. DUGUID, *DANIEL*, REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY (P&R, 2008). - TREMPER LONGMAN III, *DANIEL*, NIV APPLICATION COMMENTARY (ZONDERVAN, 1999). - JOYCE G. BALDWIN, *DANIEL*, TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES (IVP, 1978).

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ARTICLES AND BACKGROUND - ADRIEN LENGLET, "LA STRUCTURE LITTÉRAIRE DE DANIEL 2-7," *BIBLICA* 53 (1972): 169-90. - J. PAUL TANNER, "THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL," *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* 160 (2003). - THE SEPTUAGINT TEXT OF DANIEL 3, IN THE UPDATED BRENTON TRANSLATION (EBIBLE.ORG).

NOTES

1. Regnal dates follow the standard chronology based on the Babylonian Chronicles; see A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles* (1975), or any of the commentaries listed.
2. The Old Greek text, also attested in the early papyrus 967, reads "In his eighteenth year Nebuchadnezzar the king made a golden image." Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year corresponds to about 587 BC (compare Jeremiah 52:29).
3. See the discussions in Miller and Goldingay. Akkadian *dūru* means "wall, fortification."
4. The Greek-derived words are *qaytĕrōs* (compare Greek *kitharis*), *pĕsantērîn* (*psaltērion*), and *sûmpōnyâ* (*symphōnia*). Greek musicians and instruments were known in the Near East before Alexander, so scholars weigh this evidence differently.
5. Adrien Lenglet, "La structure littéraire de Daniel 2-7," *Biblica* 53 (1972): 169-90; see also J. Paul Tanner, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003).
6. The Aramaic is *hēn ʾîtay ʾĕlāhanāʾ dîʾānaḥnāʾ pālĕḥîn yākil lĕšēzābûtanāʾ*. Whether *ʾîtay* ("there is") goes with what precedes or with "able" accounts for the different translations.

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