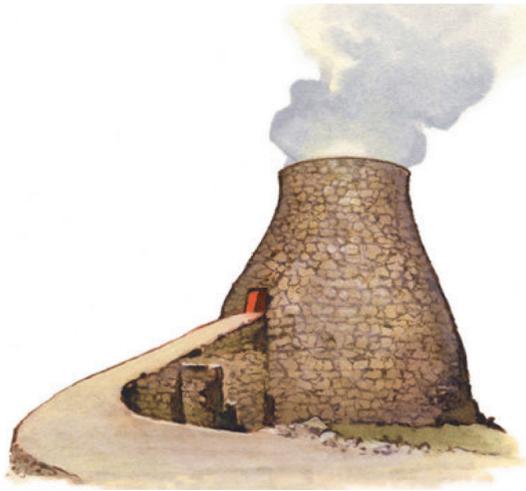


threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the gold smelting kiln were killed themselves.

- Looking into the entrance of the kiln Nebuchadnezzar now has his second significant encounter with God: *Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.*” (Daniel 3:25)
- As had happened 20 years earlier Nebuchadnezzar is forced to recognise who the true God was on the plain of Dura that day: *“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. 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.”* (Daniel 3:28-9)
- Unfortunately, like most of us, Nebuchadnezzar’s faith soon wanes as Chapter 4 reveals!



## 2.6 Conclusion

- So as we consider this moment in history who are we most like:
  - i) Nebuchadnezzar - continuing to do things our way despite having seen God’s hand revealed in our lives.
  - ii) the crowd - always taking the easy road and failing to put our heads above the parapet.
  - iii) the astrologers - continuing to bear grudges and seeking revenge for past hurts.
  - iv) or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - who are a shining example of faith in action.

## 3. Questions to consider at home

- 3.1 Why does Nebuchadnezzar build his image of gold? What idols do we worship today? Who or what are your idols?
- 3.2 What did Jesus mean when he preached: *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.* (Matthew 7:13-4)
- 3.3 Why did *‘some astrologers denounce the Jews?’* (Daniel 3:8) Are you harbouring any grudges against anyone
- 3.4 How would you describe faith?
- 3.5 What do we learn about God’s character from this moment in history?

Matthew Street 5<sup>th</sup> August 2018



# The Parish of Peasedown St John

## Daniel 3:1-30 - The fiery furnace

### Passage, Talk Notes and Questions

Please feel free to take these talk notes home with you and you may wish to find some time during this week to consider the questions below.

#### 1. Talk Passage – Daniel 3:1-30

*Please read Daniel 3:1-30*



#### 2. Talk Notes

##### 2.1 Introduction

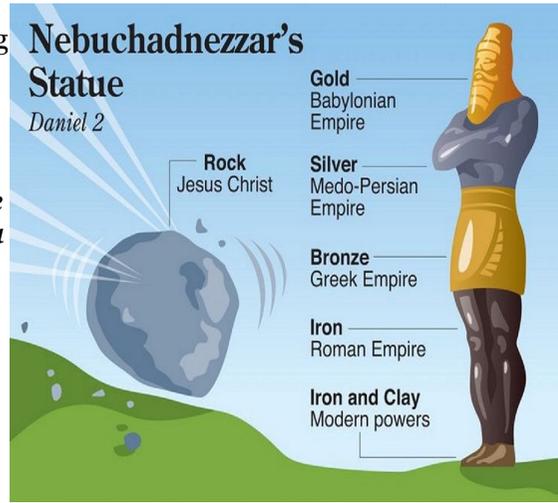
Imagine the scene. The day has come. All the key people across the Babylonian empire have been invited. King Nebuchadnezzar has finally finished building on the plain of Dura, just out Babylon, his new statue. A giant idol to himself, 90 feet high and 9 feet wide. He has decided to unite the great Babylonian Empire around him. No longer will he tolerate worship of other gods, everyone will now worship him. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three close Jewish friends of Daniel now have a difficult choice to make. Will they bow down and worship the King’s new idol or face being thrown into one of the kilns standing nearby that had been used to smelt the gold for the new statue. They hadn’t forgotten the second commandment that God had given to Moses: *You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them* (Exodus 20:4-5).

Having been elevated to positions of power as a direct result of Daniel interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (See Daniel 2) Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego along with Daniel have incurred the wrath of the court astrologers who are out for revenge and point out to Nebuchadnezzar that these three Jewish exiles are refusing to bow down to him and join in his new religion.

- Who are we most like in this scene:
  - Nebuchadnezzar,
  - the crowd,
  - the astrologers
  - or Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego?

### 2.2. Nebuchadnezzar

- Twenty years earlier Nebuchadnezzar had had a troubling dream that his court astrologers could not interpret. Daniel prayed that God might reveal to him what the dream was and its interpretation: *‘During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision’.* (Daniel 2:19)
- Daniel informed Nebuchadnezzar that *‘there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.’* (Daniel 2:28)



- Having correctly interpreted the dream *‘King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honour and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery. Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.’* (Daniel 2:46-9)
- Twenty years has dulled Nebuchadnezzar’s memory of this significant encounter with God. Instead of getting to know God better he has gone his own way and fearful of his legacy he has deluded himself into believing that he was god himself and that everyone should worship him.
- Maybe some of us are like Nebuchadnezzar, we can look back to a time when God moved in our lives, but over time, like him, we have moved away putting self back on the throne of our lives.

### 2.3 The crowd

- Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up* (Daniel 3:7)
- It is always much easier to go with the crowd. Far harder to go against it. Jesus reminds us of this in his famous sermon on the mount: *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to*

*destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.* (Matthew 7:13-4)

- Are we prepared as Christians in our work places, our families and our neighbourhoods to live authentically? Are we prepared to be different or will we always take the easy road and follow the crowd?

### 2.4 The astrologers

- ‘At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews’* (Daniel 3:8)
- It is quite something to harbour revenge for twenty years but that is clearly what is going on here with these court astrologers. They hated the fact that Daniel, a foreigner, had correctly interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream.
- They were in no way grateful that by doing so Daniel had saved them from certain death: *This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.* (Daniel 2:12)
- Are we too harbouring grudges against people? Has our pride been dented? Have we lost face in a situation and we are quietly seeking revenge?
- If we are, maybe we need to remember Jesus’ second commandment which is to *‘Love your neighbour as yourself’* (Matthew 22:39)

### 2.5 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

- Having been summoned before the King, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego:
  - Stand united: *‘If we’* (Daniel 3:16)
  - Do not deny what they have done and they do not give any excuses: *‘we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter’* (Daniel 3:16)
  - They are also not concerned about their lives, knowing that God will be their judge and defender: *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. 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.’* (Daniel 3:16-8)
  - They are also not rude to Nebuchadnezzar recognising his position of authority each time they speak to him they refer to him as *‘Your Majesty.’* (Daniel 3:18)
- In Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1 we are told: *‘faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.’* Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are trusting that God will *‘deliver’* them from Nebuchadnezzar but they do not know how God will do that.
- Someone has come up with an acronym for FAITH:

Forsaking  
All  
I  
Take  
Him

- this is exactly what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are doing. Are we likewise prepared to be like them? How strong are our faith levels at the moment?
- What follows is truly miraculous as the faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is vindicated. Boiling with fury Nebuchadnezzar *‘ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual’* (Daniel 3:19) in fact so hot that the soldiers who