

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF DANIEL

PART THREE – KEEPING COOL WHEN THE HEAT IS ON

Having topped the class in a foreign university through trusting God to shape their lives, and drawn on the wisdom of God to explain the dream of a ruthless king, Daniel and his three friends now faced another challenge.

The three friends had been promoted to the rank of provincial governors when Daniel became prime minister. This time the king wanted to test his representatives' absolute loyalty to him as insecure leaders do. He had built an enormous gold statue 30 metres high and 3 metres wide. The amount of gold needed for this enterprise gives a glimpse of the fabulous wealth of the Babylonian empire. It seems highly likely that the statue bore a definite resemblance to Nebuchadnezzar himself, such was his vanity as a successful leader. The order was given to worship the statue as a god. The dedication of this new 'god' was to be a great public occasion complete with a full orchestra. The alternative was to be roasted in the palace furnace. To the ordinary royal advisors, conforming was the obvious choice. Flattering the king was just part of their job description. To the general public used to doing what they were told without asking questions, worshipping the king was an every day habit.

A group of Chaldeans, the supposedly wise advisors, no doubt jealous of the promotion over them of the 4 Jewish young men, saw their opportunity for revenge. They pointed out to the king that the 3 provincial governors, Daniel had appointed, were refusing to join in this public ceremony of king-worship. Right from the beginning of their training they had firmly separated their responsibility to God from their responsibility to the government. Jesus gave the same answer when asked about paying taxes to Caesar. We are to 'render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's' – that is hand over the money the government issue to them when they demand it – 'but to render to God the things that are God's' – that is keep our hearts and lives solely under God's management.(Matt.22:21)

When the king heard that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were refusing to worship his statue, he had another murderous fit of rage similar to the one in chapter 2, and demanded their worship or else that they face the furnace. He asked what god could deliver them and so gave them a wonderful opportunity to witness to their faith in the one God who can deliver all of us if we trust Him. He could do this by somehow rescuing them from the furnace or else He would save them in heaven. Either way they were content to worship Him alone and take the consequences. The Bible has many examples of those who trusted God miraculously saved from their enemies and many others martyred for their faith.

This one act of rebellion stoked the king to uncontrollable rage so that he had the furnace stoked to a huge blaze. Some of his elite soldiers were to be the execution squad. They tied up the three prisoners and threw them into the furnace. The wild flames leapt out and consumed the executioners. The king watched for the prisoners to die and could not believe his eyes. Not only were the three victims not burned but they were joined by a fourth man and all four were walking around free in the fire, unharmed. What scared the

king most was that the fourth man looked like 'a son of the gods', which can also be translated 'a son of God'. Jesus, the Son of God, had joined His faithful followers in the furnace as He promised His New Testament disciples who went out to serve Him, 'Lo, I am with you always.'(Matt.28:20) and 'I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you.'(Heb.13:5)

The king ordered his three young governors released and they emerged without even a scorch on their clothes or a mark on their skins. He was deeply convicted about what happens when men trust God rather man, even a king. In a complete about turn the king changed the rules. Now it was anyone who spoke against the God of the Bible who would face the death penalty.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ON DANIEL, CHAPTER THREE

Q.1 The king built a statue 30 metres high made of gold. Whom do you think it looked like? What did he expect people to do to his statue? Why would someone running a country do this? How may God deal with those who accept the worship due only to Him?(Acts 12:20-23) Can you think of any examples in modern times of the same thing being done?

Q.2 What would happen to Daniel's three friends if they refused to worship the idol? What kinds of 'idols' are we asked to worship these days?(I Jn.5:21) Why did they refuse? What are we threatened with if we don't 'go with the flow' in our society? How can we work out when we should obey our governments and when we should refuse?

Q.3 What happened when the three Jews were thrown into the king's barbecue? Who was the fourth person in the fire? How can we expect the same to happen when we are pushed but refuse to do what everyone else is doing? Can we be sure we won't ever get hurt by bullies? In what sense will we be aware of the presence of Jesus when times are tough?