

brews were obeying the second commandment of God's ten-commandment law.

The first commandment says: "You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3, page 70)

With regard to images, the second commandment says: "You shall not bow down to them nor serve them." (Exodus 20:4,5)

The principles of freedom of worship have often been trampled underfoot in past history. Sometimes atheistic governments have outlawed the worship of God, and at other times religious powers have controlled governments and enforced their dogmas upon whole nations under pain of excommunication or even death.

This is true even of Christians who persecuted fellow Christians during the Dark Ages and at other times. Later in his book, Daniel foretold that this would happen. You may have noticed already that freedom of conscience is an important subject in the book of Daniel.

# DANIEL

## 4. SAGA OF THE GOLDEN IDOL



The band played, the furnace roared, the  
crowds bowed while three captives and a fourth  
man walked unharmed among the flames

## Look For These Points

- Nebuchadnezzar defies prophecy.
- Three top ministers of state forced to choose between death and loyalty to God.
- Miraculous rescue from a fiery death.
- Evidence that God is with us in our daily experiences of decision and distress.

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S GRAND OBSESSION

*Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed by the image in his dream that he decided to build one like it for himself. But instead of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay as in the dream, every centimetre of the idol was to be of gold!*

### Why Gold?

You see, despite Daniel's interpretation of the image, Nebuchadnezzar had ideas of his own about the future. He evidently decided that his kingdom was going to stand forever! No silver, bronze, iron, or clay kingdoms, such as in his dream, would replace his Babylon! Babylon was the "eternal city" and he was the king. In one of his inscriptions he wrote:

*"I erected [there] a stela (showing) me (as) everlasting king."* (Ancient Near Eastern Texts, Page 307)



Babylon

Recent discoveries show how determined Nebuchadnezzar must have been about this. If you were to visit the ruins of ancient Babylon in southern Iraq today, you could walk on the great paving stones of Nebuchadnezzar's procession street named AI-IBUR-SHABU. In English, this means "the enemy will never pass". It was to be "gold forever" as far as Nebuchadnezzar was con-

## Exhibit 1

### TWO LOYALTIES

Jesus explained that Christians have two loyalties - one to their earthly rulers, and the other to God. With regard to rulers he said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (Matthew 22:21, page 958)

### WHAT DO WE OWE "CAESAR"?

"Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities." (Romans 13:1-7, page 1095)

"Therefore, I exhort first of all that ... prayers ... be made for kings, and all who are in authority." (1 Timothy 2:1-3, page 1140)

The principle of human government is appointed by God to preserve order and to protect the lives, property, and welfare of its citizens. Each citizen is bound to cooperate with the government by obeying the laws of the land.

However, governments should not assume power over the human conscience. To make religious laws, telling its citizens whom to worship, when to worship, how to worship, or not to worship, is to usurp the place of God and to violate the most basic principle of human freedom.

### WHAT DO WE OWE GOD?

God's laws go deeper than human laws. They are to govern our consciences, thoughts, and desires, as well as our actions. While the breaking of human law is crime, the breaking of God's law is sin. With regard to His laws, God instructed Israel:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today, shall be in your heart." (Deuteronomy 6:5,6, page 173)

### WHEN HUMAN LAWS CLASH WITH GOD'S LAW:

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29, page 1056)  
In refusing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar's gold image, the three He-

## OPTIONAL QUESTIONS TO THINK THROUGH

1. Does it seem to you that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego took their religion too seriously?
2. Did they really do the right thing? Was it so wrong just to bow to an image? Would that hurt anyone? Is God all that particular about loyalty and obedience to him?
3. Should all people be given freedom of conscience with regard to their religious beliefs?
4. Why can't God give his people a special "exemption" from obedience, when obeying Him might bring suffering or death?

## REVIEW QUIZ (T/F)

- 1) Daniel was one of the men thrown into the furnace
- 2) Nebuchadnezzar had only the head of his image made of gold, as in his dream
- 3) The king saw three figures walking in the flames.
- 4) The three men who refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image tried to bargain for their lives.
- 5) The rescue of the three men from the fire caused the king to believe that everyone should worship the true God.
- 6) Nebuchadnezzar acted rightly when he decreed the death penalty upon anyone who spoke against God.

cerned.

When the image was finished, the king arranged an elaborate religious ceremony. He sent word out to all his officials throughout the empire to attend. As they assembled on the Plain of Dura, the image towering above them must have presented a spectacular sight.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### A. PRIDE IN ACTION

#### QUESTION 1 (Daniel 3:1, page 858)

What were the two outstanding features of this image?

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of \_\_\_\_\_, whose \_\_\_\_\_ was sixty cubits" (90-100 feet or 27-30 metres). (Verse 1)

#### QUESTION 2 (Daniel 3:2-5)

As the ceremony opened, what was everyone present ordered to do? (for answer circle a, b, or c)

- (a) dance for joy
- (b) start singing the national anthem
- (c) fall down and worship the image when the music sounded

#### QUESTION 3 (Daniel 3:6)

What was the penalty for disobeying Nebuchadnezzar's command to worship the image?

"(They) shall be cast \_\_\_\_\_ into the midst of a burning fiery \_\_\_\_\_." (Verse 6)

### B. NOT EVERYONE OBEYS

#### QUESTION 4 (Daniel 3:7-12)

There was an overwhelming response when the band struck up. Thou-



sands fell to the ground before the idol. No wonder! To refuse meant death by burning. But not everyone obeyed. Informers were quick to report to the king that three prominent people had not bowed down. Who were they?

*"There are certain \_\_\_\_\_ whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: . . . They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image, which you have set up." (Verse 12)*

### C. THE HIGH COST OF LOYALTY TO GOD

Upon hearing that his command had been disobeyed by three Jews, Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage. The offenders were his three governors: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, whom we met in Daniel 1. Hustled into his presence, they were angrily interrogated. Would they be thrown into the flames? No! Not yet! They would be given just one more chance! They could save their lives by simply bowing to the image the next time the music began! It would be as easy as that!



All of Babylon were commanded to kneel and worship the golden image

#### QUESTION 5 (Daniel 3:13-15, page 858)

What statement by Nebuchadnezzar makes it clear that he was challenging the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in all this?

*"And who is the \_\_\_\_\_ who will deliver you from \_\_\_\_\_ hands?" (Verse 15)*

With firmness and great courage, the three made their reply: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. . . Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O King. But if not, let it be known to you, O King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." (verses 16-18)

Later we will come to prophecies in the book of Daniel which foretold that powerful rulers would one day try to do as Nebuchadnezzar did—force millions to worship *their* way, in an attempt to establish an everlasting kingdom.

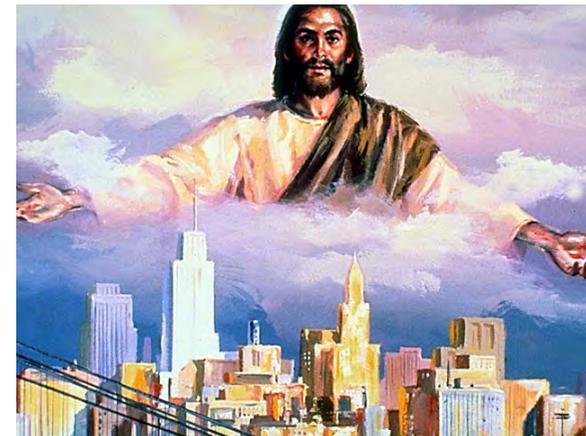
That is one reason why the experience of the fiery furnace is important to the book of Daniel.

- a) Would you like to have the same kind of loyalty and faith in God as the three heroes in this story?

**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_

- b) Do you want to have Christ with you, too, sharing your trials and protecting you?

**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_



**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_

Can you sense that God was trying to win Nebuchadnezzar? Trying to save the king? Was the king showing some response?

**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_

Did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego lose out by being loyal to God?

**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 13** (Daniel 3:28, 29, page 859)

What three things most impressed Nebuchadnezzar about the miracle of the fiery furnace?

- 1) “who sent His \_\_\_\_\_ and”
- 2) “\_\_\_\_\_ His servants”
- 3) “who \_\_\_\_\_ in Him” (verse 28)

*How wonderful that the divine “fourth man” should go into the flames to be with these three courageous men! He did not stop the guards from throwing them in, but went in with them. Would you like to write a brief statement on what we can learn from the presence of the fourth man in the furnace.*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**QUESTION 14**

**QUESTION 6** ((Daniel 3:19-21)

Infuriated by their reply, what did Nebuchadnezzar order his guards to do?

**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_

**D. COMPANION IN THE FLAMES**

**QUESTION 7** (Daniel 3:22-25, page 859)

As the king looked into the furnace, expecting to see the captives incinerated, he could not believe his eyes. What did he see?

*“Look!” he answered, “I see \_\_\_\_\_ men \_\_\_\_\_ walking in the midst of the fire and they are not \_\_\_\_\_.” (Verse 25)*

You will notice from verses 22 and 23 that the soldiers who threw the three men into the furnace were themselves killed by the searing heat. Yet their victims, who were right in the fire, survived unharmed. What had saved them so miraculously? Was it the presence of the fourth man?



**QUESTION 8** (Daniel 3:25)

Who did Nebuchadnezzar say the fourth man was like?

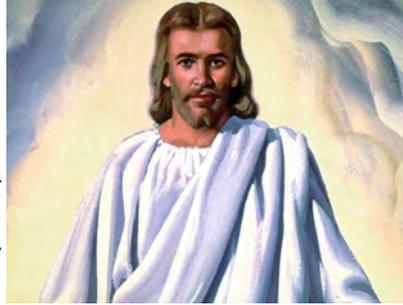
**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_

NOTE: Some translations says: “like the Son of God”; others: “like a son of gods”. Both translations are permissible from the original. Could Nebuchadnezzar have known anything about the **one God** of Hebrews or the **Son of God**?

Note that Nebuchadnezzar had just been boasting that the **Hebrews’** God could not save the three out of his hand. So he did know about the

one God of the Hebrews. That is why, when he saw them alive with the fourth man in the flames, he declared in amazement:

*“The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego sent his Angel (messenger) and delivered his servants.” (Verse 28)*



*Many hold the view that this “angel” was actually the Son of God, for He did intervene in human affairs in Old Testament times as the deliverer of God’s people. And He comes more and more into view in the later prophecies of Daniel as the Great Deliverer. (More on this as we come to those chapters.)*

The son of God protected the three young Hebrew men in the flames

### QUESTION 9 (Daniel 3:16-18, page 858)

Read these verses carefully before answering this question. Do you think that the decision of Daniel's three friends not to bow down was because they believed that God would be sure to save them?

YES      NO      [circle your choice]

Would you like to comment briefly on what you think their real motive was in disobeying the king's orders.

\_\_\_\_\_

Why would the three Hebrews think it wrong to bow down to the image?

**ANSWER:** \_\_\_\_\_

### READ EXHIBIT 1: Page 11& 12

#### **MAN’S TWO LOYALTIES**

*this helps to explain whether or not it was right to disobey the king’s orders.*

## E. NEBUCHADNEZZAR CHANGES HIS MIND

### QUESTION 10 (Daniel 3:26)

As Nebuchadnezzar called to the men in the furnace to come out, by what title did he refer to their God?

*“The \_\_\_\_\_ God.” (verse 26)*

### QUESTION 11 (Daniel 3:27, page 859)

Did the Babylonian officials find any effects of fire on the three Hebrews?

*“The hair of their head was not \_\_\_\_\_ nor were their \_\_\_\_\_ affected, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the fire was not on them.” (verse 27)*

### QUESTION 12 (Daniel 3:28, 29)

What sudden change came over Nebuchadnezzar because of this amazing experience? What decree did he make?

*“Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against ... God ... shall be \_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ .” (verse 29)*

*Astonished and shaken, Nebuchadnezzar could do nothing but acknowledge God. In fact, from now on everyone throughout his empire must acknowledge God! The king decreed that, henceforth, any remark made against the God of the Jews would bring sudden death to the offender. In his ignorance the king thought he was doing God a favour by making this decree. But was he?*



*But was he?*

Has God given rulers the task of enforcing worship or religious belief upon their subjects?