

Focus on Prophecy

GUIDE 2



The Life and Times of Nebuchadnezzar

- **The Life and Times**
- **Persecution.** It's happening in countries all over the world. In one country thousands of Christians have been sold as slaves. It happened to a little girl named Akuac from one of the southern tribes in her country. She was abducted by militiamen and taken north. Her master forced her to work long hours in a kitchen where she slept and survived on table scraps. He tried to make her follow his religious faith, giving her a different name and forcing her to follow his customs. But little Akuac wouldn't give up her faith. She prayed and sang hymns in secret whenever she could. She clung to her Christian convictions for seven years until a Swiss charity group bought her back from slavery.

The Life and Times of Nebuchadnezzar

- **It's happening in a country where many believers have been harassed and even tortured. One courageous pastor was jailed twenty-five times. On one occasion he was hung upside down, and hot oil was poured on his feet. But he kept his faith alive. It's happening in countries and towns around the globe. The rights of Christians are trampled, and they stand up for their convictions against the threat of persecution.**
- **The story in the third chapter of Daniel could have been taken from today's headlines. It's one of the significant chapters in the history of suffering believers. It sheds light on what many are experiencing in the present. And it shows us why they're able to cling to God—even in the worst of times.**

The Life and Times of Nebuchadnezzar

- **A monarch named King Nebuchadnezzar, whom we met in Daniel 1 and 2, continues to play a key role in this part of Daniel's story. His pride and desire for power and recognition lie behind two important events which we'll examine in this lesson.**
- **All Babylon was buzzing with a marvel that had appeared on the Plain of Dura: "Have you seen it? It's unbelievable!" "A huge statue of a man made out of pure gold?" "Oh if I could just have one of its toes!"**
- **As the morning sun crested the hills around the city, its blinding rays danced and shimmered off the golden head and shoulders of this man-made image. Visible for miles, it was the talk of Babylon.**

Event 1: The Golden Image (Daniel 3)

- **King Nebuchadnezzar had been deeply impressed by the image made of different metals and clay (Daniel 2) he had seen in his dream—especially by that head of gold. For a while he honored Daniel and the God of heaven. But after a time Nebuchadnezzar appears to have had second thoughts. He felt a little resentful. God had said another kingdom would arise and overthrow Babylon. Well, maybe Nebuchadnezzar could edit this prophecy a bit. What if he constructed a replica of this image—but made it all gold from head to toe? It would be his way of creating an image of Babylon as the eternal empire. So the king decided he would do just that. He would order all administrative officials to gather before the image, bow down to it, and pledge undying allegiance to him.**

Event 1: The Golden Image (Daniel 3)

- **Nebuchadnezzar's engineers and architects went to work. It wasn't long until an image towered over the Plain of Dura; it stood approximately one hundred feet tall and twelve feet across. This image was really an act of rebellion. The king was defying God's word. He was creating a counterfeit to the true prophetic symbol Daniel had shown him. Instead of telling the people of his kingdom the truth about the future, as God had revealed it to him, he deceived them. Nebuchadnezzar was acting on behalf of Satan, the originator of lies and deception (John 8:44). His image ultimately stood in opposition to Jesus the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And so, in Bible prophecy, Babylon came to represent the opposite of what God stands for—lies, deceit, and eternal death trying to replace truth, faithfulness, and eternal life. This concept comes into clear focus in the book of Revelation.**

Event 1: The Golden Image (Daniel 3)

- **Nebuchadnezzar was making a very important choice, one with eternal consequences. Three young Hebrew men had to do the same.**
- **Not only did Nebuchadnezzar choose to create an image made entirely of gold, not only did he order all his officials to bow down before it, but he announced, “It is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that . . . whoever does not fall down and worship [it] shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:4-6).**

Event 1: The Golden Image (Daniel 3)

- **Nebuchadnezzar was using political authority to enforce a certain kind of worship. In later chapters of Daniel and in the book of Revelation, we will see how this combination of church and state is pictured in prophecy. It's part of a counterfeit religious system that will rear its ugly head again and oppress God's people.**
- **The first of the Ten Commandments states, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exodus 20:3-5).**

Event 1: The Golden Image (Daniel 3)

- **Those on the Plain of Dura who wanted to serve the God of heaven were faced with a terrible dilemma: they could disobey God's commandment and bow down to King Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue—and live. Or they could obey God's commandment and refuse to bow down to it—and die.**
- **As the elite of Babylon gathered around Nebuchadnezzar's image, there was quite a fanfare. Horns rang out; cymbals clashed. The military might of Babylon encircled the crowd—soldiers in full armor. For most of those assembled this was a celebration. Food and drink flowed freely. They partied into the night. But then suddenly the assembly grew quiet. The king's spokesman was shouting instructions.**

Event 1: The Golden Image (Daniel 3)

- **As soon as the royal band struck up, as soon as horns, flutes, lyres, and pipes sounded, everyone was to bow down and worship the king's golden statue. In the background dark smoke ascended from a brick kiln, emphasizing the consequence of defiance—death in a fiery furnace.**
- **Thought question: When representatives from all over the kingdom gathered at the plain of Dura where the golden image was erected, they were told that those who did not bow to the image would be thrown into a fiery furnace. (True or False)**
- **King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of solid gold as a tribute to the kingdom of Medo-Persia which was to follow his empire of Babylon. (True or False)**

Standing Firm

- **The spokesman gave a signal, and the band began to play. Barely a note was heard before the sea of people surrounding the image flattened; everyone lay prostrate on the ground. A smile must have crept across Nebuchadnezzar's face at the spectacle. But his pleasure was short-lived. Several Chaldeans rushed to the king's side and delivered unpleasant news. They said, "There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up" (vs. 12).**

Standing Firm

- **Daniel's three friends—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—had remained standing, refusing to bow down and worship the image in spite of the king's decree.**
- **Nebuchadnezzar was furious! He ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego brought before him. He told them he would give them one more chance to bow down. If they didn't, they'd be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. What a scene!**
- **Prostrate officials were peering out of the corners of their eyes at the commotion near King Nebuchadnezzar. There they stood, three young Hebrews who defied the king. These young men didn't need more time to think about it.**

Standing Firm

- **“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, 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’ ” (vss. 16-18).**

Standing Firm

- **Wow! What would you have done in that situation? You're facing a raging furnace; black smoke swirls above it. Sparks fly; you can feel the intensity of the heat on your face. Death is certain. If those three Hebrews had hesitated, if they'd thought about saving their necks, Satan might have had an opportunity to make them conform. But they clung to their faith as an anchor and made a quick response to follow their Lord unconditionally. They believed the God of heaven would deliver them alive from the flames. But they assured Nebuchadnezzar that even if they died in the fiery furnace, they would never serve his gods or worship his golden image.**
- **Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego believed that the God of heaven was at their side. But they also acknowledged that He does not always choose to deliver us in the way we would like.**

- **They knew about the prophet Urijah's fate. A few years earlier he'd given clear warnings aimed at King Jehoiakim's corruption. That cowardly monarch had him executed (Jeremiah 26:20-23).**
- **Have you ever felt isolated as the "different" one? Maybe you didn't laugh at a cruel or racist joke; maybe you chose not to watch some popular TV show because it was mean-spirited or vulgar; maybe your beliefs make you seem the "odd one" at work. Remember, God is a great deliverer, but sometimes He allows us to witness for Him in what may appear to be defeat rather than victory. When Jesus felt very isolated and burdened in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He was facing death on the cross, He still managed to pray: "Thy will be done, not My own." God will help you do the same. The Lord can use apparent defeat and isolation to bring about victory and reconciliation. Just make sure that you keep manifesting the graciousness and friendliness of Christ.**

Standing Firm

- **John Huss is an example of a person who suffered for his faith—and yet remained gracious to the end. This Czech reformer stood firm for gospel truth against the corrupt church of his day. But he was always eager to learn. When the Council of Constance demanded that he renounce his biblical teachings, Huss replied, “I would most gladly recant before all the world every falsehood and every error I ever have thought of saying or have said.” But his accusers tried to bully instead of persuade, and Huss was condemned. At the execution grounds Huss underwent a “ceremony of degradation.” When bishops intoned a final curse, “We commit your soul to the Devil!”—Huss answered, “And I commit it to the most merciful Lord Jesus Christ.” As the wood and straw, piled up to his neck were lit, Huss began singing, “Christ, Thou Son of the living God, have mercy on us.” His lips were still moving silently when he died.**

- **When the three Hebrews refused to bow down to his golden image, King Nebuchadnezzar “was full of fury” (vs. 19). “Then these three men were bound . . . and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. . . . Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace” (vs. 23).**
- **Nebuchadnezzar expected them to die at once. But to his amazement, the flames didn’t harm them at all! It simply burned away the ropes that had tied them up! As the king kept watching, he saw the three Hebrews walking around in the fire, completely unharmed.**
- **“Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, ‘Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? I see four men loose . . . and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God’ ” (vss. 24, 25).**

Standing Firm

- **What a powerful example of God's power and protection! Jesus stood in the furnace with His friends! Through this great deliverance He says to you and me, "You don't have to go into the furnace by yourself. I will go with you. In fact, I will walk into the flames before you do and lead you step-by-step through the fire. So bring Me your problems, your trials, fears, and disappointments. Bring Me your longings, your desire to be changed. Bring to Me your faith—no matter how little or how big."**
- **Have you ever felt like you were walking in the flames without God? You never have to again. Listen to God's promise: "You are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God" (Isaiah 43:1-3).**

Standing Firm

- **TO THINK ABOUT:** *When you read these verses what do you want to say to Jesus?*
- **READ DANIEL 3:26-30.**
- **The fire had no power on these three faithful friends of Daniel. “The hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them” (vs. 27). Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace did not harm the three Hebrews in the least. The king realized that their God had delivered them. He declared, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who . . . delivered His servants. . . . because there is no other God who can deliver like this” (vss. 28, 29). Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to more important positions in the government of Babylon, because of their faithfulness to God (vs. 30).**

Standing Firm

- **So, Nebuchadnezzar decided to honor God. What else could he do? All his officials around him had witnessed the power of God. They had seen how He honors those who follow Him. Unfortunately the king did not remain humbled before the God of heaven. Chapter four continues our story.**
- **Thought question: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told the king that God would save them from the fire, but even if He didn't, they would not bow down to the image. (True or False)**

Event 2: Eating Like a Cow (Daniel 4)

- **What Nebuchadnezzar saw at the fiery furnace impelled him to decree that anyone who spoke against God was to be killed. But he himself later forgot about God and suffered greatly. What he learned as a result is recorded in Daniel chapter 4.**
- **This is a remarkable document: the personal testimony of the most powerful monarch of that time revealing how God intervened in his life.**
- **As recorded in Daniel 4:1, 2, Nebuchadnezzar declared that he was recounting his experience in order to witness to the way God had worked in his behalf. He testified of God, “How great are His signs, and how mighty His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:3).**

Event 2: Eating Like a Cow (Daniel 4)

- **Nebuchadnezzar had another disturbing dream. Once again he called the wise men before his throne. This time the king remembered what he'd dreamed. But his wise men were unable to tell him what it all meant. Then Daniel walked in, and Nebuchadnezzar told him about the dream. He said, "I was looking, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree became strong; its height reached to the heavens, and it could be seen to the ends of all the earth. . . . The beasts of the field found shade under it, the birds of the heavens dwelt in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it" (vss. 10-12).**

Event 2: Eating Like a Cow (Daniel 4)

- **But then the king saw in his dream an angel (a “watcher”) come from heaven.**
- **This angel cried out, “Chop down the tree and cut off its branches. . . . Nevertheless leave the stump and roots in the earth, bound with a band of iron and bronze” (vss. 14, 15).**
- **The angel further decreed, “Let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let him graze with the beasts on the grass of the earth.**
- **Let his heart be changed from that of a man, let him be given the heart of an animal, and let seven times pass over him” (vss. 15, 16).**

- **With its ominous shift from “it” to “him,” Daniel realized at once what this dream meant. And it filled him with apprehension. This was not good news. But Nebuchadnezzar urged him to reveal what he knew. And so Daniel explained the dream:**
- **“The tree that you saw, which grew and became strong . . . is you, O king, who have grown and become strong” (vss. 20, 22). But king had seen the tree cut down and its stump encircled with an iron band. So Daniel continued his interpretation. “This is the decree of the Most High . . . they shall drive you from men, your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make you eat grass like oxen. . . . Seven times shall pass over you, till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” (vss. 24, 25). This meant that Nebuchadnezzar would lose his reason and be driven from human society to live with animals for seven years until he recognized and accepted that the God of heaven rules in the affairs of earth.**

Event 2: Eating Like a Cow (Daniel 4)

- **God's message to the king was this: Unless Nebuchadnezzar changed his ways, he would become so deranged that he'd act like a cow who had to be turned out into the fields to eat grass. He would remain in this condition for seven years. His uncut and uncombed hair would mat together until it looked like eagle feathers. His fingernails would grow long and curl like the claws of an eagle. Today, psychiatry identifies an affliction like this as "boanthropy," a condition which makes people think they are a cow and start acting like an animal.**

- **Nebuchadnezzar, however, would be able to escape this calamity if he surrendered to God and chose to follow Him.**
- **Twelve months after he received this dream from God, it all came true (vss. 28, 29).**
- **Overlooking his capital, the king exclaimed, “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built?” Babylon was indeed a magnificent metropolis. Nebuchadnezzar’s father, Nabopolassar, had defeated the Assyrians and assisted in the rebuilding of Babylon, which had been destroyed in 689 B.C.**
- **The city boasted many beautiful palaces, temples, shrines, and rooftop gardens. In fact, its Hanging Gardens were eventually considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World.**

Event 2: Eating Like a Cow (Daniel 4)

- **Nebuchadnezzar wanted all this glory for himself. He forgot that it is God who sets up kings and who removes them. And so his enormous ego snapped. The king lost touch with reality. For seven years he lived like an animal. His mind was deranged by pride and arrogance. But at last Nebuchadnezzar made the right decision, the right commitment. He accepted that God was in charge. His reason returned, and he praised the God of heaven. He declared, “I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever” (vs. 34).**

Event 2: Eating Like a Cow (Daniel 4)

- **Nebuchadnezzar had faced the same big question that Daniel faced, the same big question that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all faced—“Will I be a faithful friend of God?” That is the ultimate question for you and me. It calls us to make a decision. Will we make a commitment to stand with God—even in the worst of times? To whom do you relate the most—Nebuchadnezzar or the three Hebrew young men? God can help you to be faithful, just like the three young men, if you ask Him. Why not ask Him today?**
- **Thought question: After seven years of living like an animal, Nebuchadnezzar regained his mind and praised the God of heaven. (True or False)**
- **In Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a giant tree, the tree was a symbol of King Nebuchadnezzar himself. (True or False)**

Conclusion

- **During World War II a young Christian named Desmond Doss trained to become a medic. Later on the islands of Guam, Leyte, and Okinawa, he bravely dodged bullets and grenades to rescue his wounded buddies.**
- **Desmond wanted to live a consistent Christian life—even in the midst of war.**
- **And even his most profane fellow soldiers came to respect him.**
- **At first they'd sometimes throw boots at him when he knelt by his cot for prayer. But during fierce fighting on the islands of the Pacific, they began to regard his quiet courage with awe.**

Conclusion

- **On May 5, 1945, Desmond's unit was ordered to launch a major assault on the Maeda Escarpment. This fifty-foot cliff was the key to controlling Okinawa. But on that fateful day, the Japanese had decided to launch an attack from the same location. Desmond's platoon of 200 men charged up a hill. Within a few minutes they'd sustained a hundred casualties.**
- **The platoon withdrew under a barrage of bullets and mortars—all except Desmond Doss. He stayed behind with the wounded. For the next few hours he scurried around the top of the cliff with a rope litter he'd rigged up, and managed to lower his comrades, one after the other, to safety.**
- **All this time machine gun fire splattered around him. But miraculously, Desmond wasn't cut down. On that day, seventy-five fellow soldiers would owe their lives to him.**

Conclusion

- **For his extraordinary courage in battle, Desmond Doss was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Truman. Desmond always said that it was his faithfulness to Bible study and prayer that sustained him during this difficult time. He had dared to be a Daniel, and God honored him for it.**
- **Each of us can find the same strength and the same resolve. We can find it as we build a relationship with God through Bible study and prayer. He will sustain us through the battles and struggles we face in everyday life. It may be a difficult marriage.**
- **It may be a loved one with a chronic illness. It may be conflicts on the job. It may be unfulfilled dreams. But whatever your difficulties, God is reaching out and promising, “I am the answer. Come to Me, and I will give you peace and rest” (see Matthew 11:28-30).**