

Daniel 3:1-7

Pride Comes Before the Fall

¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." ⁷ Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. – Daniel 3:1-7 ESV

It is impossible to know when the events of this chapter took place. The author's inclusion of them immediately after the events of chapter two leaves the impression that they happened in quick succession. However, some biblical scholars believe Nebuchadnezzar's construction of the golden image occurred years later. There is speculation that the statue was erected in the later part of 595 B.C. to celebrate a failed coup attempt. Others have suggested that the statue was erected in 585 B.C. to commemorate the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. But whatever the timing or the occasion, the golden image was intended to symbolize Babylonian supremacy over all the other nations of the earth. This image was a PR stunt designed to rally public opinion in the king's favor and elevate his status as the king of all kings.

Whether Nebuchadnezzar ordered the image to be built immediately after hearing the interpretation of his dream or did so later in his reign, his motive seems clear. The term "image" is translated from the Aramaic word *tselem* and refers to an idolatrous figure. It is found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible except chapter 3 of Daniel. The Hebrew equivalent is *selem*, which is used throughout the Old Testament to refer to idols. The text does not provide a description of the image, but the reader is led to believe that it was a physical representation of the "great image" (Daniel 2:31) Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream. Despite the disturbing nature of that dream and the less-than-optimistic meaning Daniel assigned to it, the king found ample inspiration to order the statue's construction. His primary takeaway from the interpretation appears to have been Daniel's opening words

"You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they

dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all—you are the head of gold.” – Daniel 2:37-38 ESV

He enjoyed hearing himself described as “the king of kings.” Discovering that Daniel’s God had given him power, might, and glory, Nebuchadnezzar’s overactive ego became more inflated than ever. But he was not satisfied with being “the head of gold.” He wanted more. While the dream portrayed an image comprised of different metals mixed with clay, Nebuchadnezzar commissioned a statue made of pure gold. When completed, it towered over the plain of Dura standing at a staggering height of nearly 100 feet. It only seems logical to assume that this statue bore the image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. This wasn’t an idol meant to represent Marduk, the primary god of the Babylonians; it was a tribute to one man’s obsession with his own self-importance.

There is little doubt that Nebuchadnezzar suffered from an overinflated ego and an overactive sense of self-worth. The very next chapter records yet another dream that symbolizes his struggle with pride and arrogance. Despite repeated warnings from God about his unjustified sense of self-importance, Nebuchadnezzar will stand on the balcony of his palace and proclaim, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30 ESV).

This man had every right to gloat over his own success because he ruled over the most powerful nation on earth. His might was unequalled and his kingdom was unmatched in size, wealth, and dominion. So, having erected this monument to his own success, he assembled all “the high officers, officials, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials” (Daniel 3:2 NLT) for its dedication. These men were there in an official capacity to demonstrate their allegiance to the king and to serve as representatives of the people.

As the leaders of the nation gathered in the shadow of this massive statue, a herald declared the king’s edict.

“People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king’s command! When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s gold statue.” – Daniel 3:4-5 NLT

This image was not simply a monument to Nebuchadnezzar’s success and Babylonian supremacy; it was an idol to be worshiped. The king seems to have conveniently forgotten the statement he made when Daniel interpreted his dream.

“Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings.” – Daniel 2:47 ESV

The golden statue towering over the plain of Dura was not a monument to Yahweh’s glory and might; it was a blatant tribute to Nebuchadnezzar’s accomplishments. Whether the image was made in his own likeness is irrelevant because its very presence robbed Yahweh of glory. The

king's command that all his citizens bow down and worship the image he made was an affront to the God of the universe. The same God who had graciously interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream was being treated with contempt and displaced by an image made by human hands. Not only that, but the worship Nebuchadnezzar also demanded was coerced by the threat of death.

"Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." –
Daniel 3:6 NLT

As will become clear, the king expected all people, regardless of nationality or religious affiliation, to worship his statue. Due to Nebuchadnezzar's recent conquests and his penchant for taking captives, the population of Babylon would have been a diverse mixture of disparate people groups with their own deities and religious expressions. But they were each expected to show their unadulterated allegiance to the king and his kingdom by bowing down to his statue. This included Daniel and his companions. Despite Nebuchadnezzar's glowing tribute to their God and their recent promotions, they would not escape the king's edict and its penalty.

Nebuchadnezzar was not outlawing the worship of other gods; he was simply demanding the unwavering allegiance of his subjects – upon penalty of death. Everyone was free to worship their own gods, but they were also required to demonstrate the primacy of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian state. Their allegiance was not optional. Their submission was not a matter of choice. It was a do-or-die proposition that left the people with little choice but to comply and, according to verse seven, "all the people...bowed to the ground and worshiped."

Or did they? As the chapter unfolds, it will become clear that there were a few conscientious objectors. Not everyone was willing to obey the king's edict and bow the knee to his statue. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will refuse to comply and, as a result, suffer the consequences of their civil disobedience. These three Hebrew friends will stand their ground, refusing to compromise their convictions and welcoming the opportunity to trust in the faithfulness of their God.

Daniel 3:8-18

Who Is the God Who Will Deliver You?

⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

⁹ They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. ¹¹ And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, 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. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” – Daniel 3:8-18 ESV

This iconic story has been a staple of Sunday School classes for generations. Every child who grew up going to church heard about the exploits of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. But in its telling, the story tends to take on the aura of a Grimm’s Fairy Tale. It becomes the fantastic recounting of three brave young men who proved their faith in God by standing up to the evil king and refusing to worship his false god. But their act of bravery didn’t come without cost. Their refusal to obey the king’s edict came with the penalty of death by incineration in a blazing hot furnace. This macabre-sounding story is frightening even for adults, let alone children. But with the use of colorful cartoon-like pictures and a sanitized storyline, it has been used to inspire young children to follow the example of its three brave heroes.

But is that the primary message behind the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? So often, to make the stories of the Bible more relevant and relatable, we focus on the lives of the characters they contain. We tell our children the story of Daniel in the lion’s den and challenge them to “dare to be a Daniel.” We recount the story of Joseph’s roller-coaster-like life in Egypt but focus on the reward he ultimately received for his faithfulness. We turn his life into a Horatio Alger, rags-to-riches story that portrays God as always ready to reward the patient and

faithful. The not-so-subtle message becomes: If you do the right thing, there will always be a happy ending.

The stories of the Bible recount the lives of men and women just like you and me, but they were never intended to be the primary focus of our attention. Yes, we can learn a lot about faith from the life of Abraham. We can discover what it means to be a man after God's own heart by examining the life of David. The story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can inspire us to stand up for our convictions. But by making much of men, we tend to diminish God. By focusing on the exploits of the human characters in these stories, we can lose sight of the One moving behind the scenes and orchestrating every aspect of the narrative.

From the first verses of its opening chapter, the Book of Daniel has been about God. The entire narrative began with a retelling of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of the city of Jerusalem.

The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god. – Daniel 1:2 NLT

The story began with a reminder that God was in control and behind all that had happened. But He was not done. Just a few verses later, when Daniel refused to eat the king's food, we read, "**God had given** the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel" (Daniel 1:9 NLT). As the story unfolds, we're reminded that God continued to control the affairs of men, including those of the king and the four young Hebrew boys.

God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams. – Daniel 1:19 NLT

Chapter two records the story of Nebuchadnezzar's disturbing dream and Daniel's interpretation of it. But as the verse above makes clear, Daniel received this ability from the hand of God, and as the story reveals, God was the source behind Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

"...there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future." – Daniel 2:28 NLT

The dream, its interpretation, and its meaning were all the handiwork of God. Daniel was simply the instrument God used to accomplish His predetermined plan, and even Daniel recognized his subservient role in the whole affair.

"...it is not because I am wiser than anyone else that I know the secret of your dream, but because God wants you to understand what was in your heart." – Daniel 2:30 NLT

After divulging the meaning of the dream, Daniel confessed, **“The great God was showing the king what will happen** in the future. The dream is true, and its meaning is certain” (Daniel 2:45 NLT). Even Nebuchadnezzar recognized the divine nature of the day’s events, declaring, **“Truly, your God is the greatest of gods**, the Lord over kings, a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this secret” (Daniel 2:47 NLT).

When Daniel and his friends were rewarded with promotions, the story took a positive turn. Everything was looking up. God had revealed Himself in power and the pagan king had taken notice. Then chapter three opens with Nebuchadnezzar’s decision to build a massive monument to his own glory and greatness. But it wasn’t enough for his statue to loom over the plains of Dura, he wanted all the citizens of his kingdom to bow before it. He demanded their unwavering allegiance in the form of abject worship, with death as the penalty for disobedience.

Don’t miss the message. The man who said, “Your God is the greatest of gods, the Lord over kings” was now demanding that he be worshiped like a god; he was declaring himself to be the greatest of gods. The king’s edict demanded all to “bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s gold statue” (Daniel 3:5 NLT). This was nothing less than a declaration of war. Whether Nebuchadnezzar realized it or not, he was aligning himself against “the greatest of gods.” His statue was a bold and billigerent statement of superiority and supremacy. But what God did next is surprising.

In Nebuchadnezzar’s earlier dream, God sent a massive bolder to destroy the statue. But in real life, God didn’t order a direct hit on the symbol of Nebuchadnezzar’s power. Instead, He delivered a distinctly different but no less powerful proof of His sovereignty. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would find themselves in the middle of the conflict between God and Nebuchadnezzar.

These men were not trying to make a statement. They had not made a pact to disobey the king’s edict and were not practicing a form of civil disobedience. They were simply doing what they always did, worshiping their God and living their lives in accordance with His will. But their actions were portrayed as evidence of insubordination. Driven by jealousy and hatred for these upstart Hebrews, some of the king’s Chaldean counselors leveled charges against them that were intended to result in death.

“...there are some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up.” – Daniel 3:12 NLT

Frustrated by this report, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the men be brought before him. He repeated the conditions of his edict and warned them of the consequences of their disobedience.

*“...if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And **then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?**” – Daniel 3:15 NLT*

That last line is critical to understanding the nature of the conflict taking place in this story. This is not about three men standing up for their convictions and facing off with an unjust and unrighteous king. It is about God proving His power and supremacy over the kingdoms of this world. God could have struck Nebuchadnezzar down. He could have ordered a plague to destroy the Chaldeans. But Nebuchadnezzar had issued a challenge. Not only had he erected a statue to declare his glory, but he had boldly asserted that his power was greater than that of God.

Caught in the middle of this conflict between a human king who believed himself to be a god and Yahweh, the greatest of gods, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would have their faith tested. But the story is not about their faith; it is about the One on whom their faith relied. When confronted by the king and given a final ultimatum to bow down or die, they simply replied, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, **the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power**, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up” (Daniel 3:18 NLT).

Don’t miss the nature of their reply. They clearly saw where the battle lines were drawn. They knew this was a battle for sovereignty. The king had asserted his supremacy and declared his power over their lives. He believed that he held their future in his hands and could force their allegiance simply by threatening them with loss of life. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew better because they knew their God was bigger. The king had power but he lacked true sovereignty. These young Hebrews believed that God was in control, despite the circumstances they faced. In their estimation, even the fiery furnace posed no real threat.

These young men were faith-filled because they believed their God was faithful. In their youth, they had been exposed to the Psalms and the words of encouragement they bring.

*In my distress I prayed to the Lord,
and the Lord answered me and set me free.
The Lord is for me, so I will have no fear.
What can mere people do to me?
Yes, the Lord is for me; he will help me.
I will look in triumph at those who hate me.
It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in people.
It is better to take refuge in the Lord
than to trust in princes. – Psalm 118:5-9 NLT*

And while they lived long before Jesus took on human flesh and dwelt among men, they displayed the very outlook that Jesus encouraged.

“Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” – Matthew 10:28 NLT

The point of the story is not the *size* of their faith, but its *source*. These three young men were not super-saints or spiritual icons of virtue. They were ordinary men who believed in an extraordinary God who was all-knowing, all-powerful, and fully capable of delivering them. Their willingness to enter the furnace should not be viewed as a measurement of their faith but as a bold expression of their belief in the greatness of their God.

Daniel 3:19-30

God Doesn't Need Man's Help

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ²² Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." ²⁵ He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. ²⁸ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

²⁹ Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. – Daniel 3:19-30 ESV

Nebuchadnezzar became enraged when he realized his death threat had not dissuaded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from refusing to bow down to his idol. He had warned them, "If you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace" (Daniel 3:15 ESV). Then he arrogantly challenged their God to do anything about it.

"And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?" – Daniel 3:15 ESV

But the three young men refused to compromise their convictions. They held their ground and refused to obey the king's edict, choosing instead to place their faith in God's power and providential care. They truly believed that Yahweh was fully capable of keeping them from the flames or rescuing them out of them.

“...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.” – Daniel 3:17 ESV

They had no way of knowing the outcome of the day’s events. God had given them no verbal guarantee that their lives would be spared. They even displayed a willingness to suffer whatever fate God may have in store for them.

“...even if he doesn’t [rescue us], we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.” – Daniel 3:18 NLT

Nebuchadnezzar couldn’t comprehend their willingness to face death rather than compromise their convictions. He took their refusal as a personal affront to his power and authority. They weren’t just refusing to bow down to his image; they were rejecting his right to rule their lives. As king of the world’s most powerful nation, Nebuchadnezzar had grown drunk on his own success. He was obsessed with his image and used to getting his way. Nations fell before him. Lesser kings bowed down in front of him. His own citizens feared and revered him. But when these three young Hebrew men dared to question his sovereignty and withhold their allegiance, it was more than he could stand. So, he ordered their immediate executions.

The text makes it clear that Nebuchadnezzar was not simply carrying out his own decree by ordering the deaths of three recalcitrant Hebrews. He was launching a personal attack on the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. This had become a personal battle between him and this dream-inducing, future-predicting God of Daniel and his three friends. Nebuchadnezzar was determined to come out the winner in this war of wills, so he ordered his “mighty men” to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He wasn’t leaving their arrest up to some low-level infantry soldiers who might allow them to escape. Next, he ordered the furnace to be super-heated and the three men to be clothed in layer after layer of flammable fabric. He was taking no chances. Nothing would prevent him from proving his power and asserting his authority over the meddling God of the Hebrews.

Nebuchadnezzar must have felt a perverse sense of joy as he watched his guards get consumed by the flames while throwing the three Hebrews into the furnace. There was no way of escape for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and there was no way their God could come to their aid. But Nebuchadnezzar was in for a shock. As he gazed into the furnace, he saw something that took his breath away.

“Look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!” – Daniel 3:25 NLT

This was impossible. There was no way these men could have survived the flames of the furnace. Yet, they were walking about unharmed and accompanied by some kind of celestial being. To Nebuchadnezzar’s polytheistic mind, this fourth individual was “like a son of the gods.” The appearance of this being was not like that of the three men and the king concluded that it must be a divine manifestation.

Shocked and shaken by what he was witnessing, Nebuchadnezzar approached the mouth of the furnace and called out, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!” (Daniel 3:26 ESV). The king refers to their God as *’ēlā ’illay* – God most high. As a polytheist, Nebuchadnezzar was simply confessing that the Hebrew God was the greatest of all gods. He was not declaring Yahweh to be the one true God; he was admitting that no other gods could compare or compete with the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

To the surprise of Nebuchadnezzar and his royal officials, the three men exited the furnace unharmed and untouched.

The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. – Daniel 3:27 ESV

There was no logical explanation for their miraculous survival. The king’s magicians, sorcerers, and seers were dumbfounded by what they had witnessed. The Chaldeans who had maliciously accused Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego must have been stunned by the unexpected outcome of their efforts. Having hoped to eliminate their competition, they had to stand back and watch the three Hebrews receive further praise and adulation from the king.

“Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king’s command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.” – Daniel 3:28 NLT

This was not the outcome the Chaldeans had expected. Rather than seeing their enemies burned alive, they watched as the three Hebrews were celebrated and elevated to even higher positions within the king’s administration.

But what happened next should not be overlooked or dismissed; it shouldn’t be misunderstood either. As a result of God’s miraculous deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Nebuchadnezzar issued another rash and unnecessary edict.

“Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!” – Daniel 3:28 NLT

At first glance, this appears to be a positive outcome. The king of a pagan, idol-worshipping nation is commanding that the God of the Hebrews be treated with honor and reverence. But look closely. This edict commands the worship of Yahweh under the penalty of death. It is devotion motivated by the threat of destruction. It was the same tactic Nebuchadnezzar used to coerce the worship of his statue. Bow down or die.

But God does not need men's help. He also does not desire worship that is motivated by abject fear or simply as a means of escaping death. During the days when Israel wandered in the wilderness on their way to the promised land, Moses commanded them, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4 ESV). "Worshiping" that is coerced or done out of a sense of obligation displeases God; it is meaningless, vain, and hypocritical.

God despises heartless worship that is motivated by fear rather than true faith. The whole reason Daniel and his friends were in Babylon to begin with was because their forefathers had failed to worship God in spirit and in truth.

*"I hate all your show and pretense—
the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.
I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings.
I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings.
Away with your noisy hymns of praise!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.
Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice,
an endless river of righteous living."* – Amos 5:21-24 NLT

Nebuchadnezzar was trying to manufacture worship, just as he had done with his statue. He thought he could force his people to have faith in Israel's God. But that is not the kind of worship God requires or desires. God did not need Nebuchadnezzar's help, and He did not desire the worship of those whose hearts were not in it. Worship done for the wrong reason and with an improper motivation is an affront to God.

Nebuchadnezzar's edict was not going to produce true worshipers. It would only create the same kind of shallow, fear-induced worship that God accused the Israelites of displaying.

*"...this people draw near with their mouth
and honor me with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me,
and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men..."* – Isaiah 29:3 NLT

God didn't want or need Nebuchadnezzar's help. Manufactured worship is not worship at all. Faux faithfulness that is the fruit of fear and the byproduct of threats is a sham; it won't last and it can't withstand the heat of the furnace. The faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego wasn't forced, it was from the heart.