

# JBTS

VOLUME 7 | ISSUE 1

JOURNAL OF  
BIBLICAL AND  
THEOLOGICAL  
STUDIES

## ARAMAIC AND THE BIBLE

"All Manner of Music:"  
The Author of Daniel 3 as  
Master Storyteller

*by H. A. Hopgood*

# “All Manner of Music:” The Author of Daniel 3 as Master Storyteller

H. A. HOPGOOD

*H. A. Hopgood is a scholar of the biblical languages and a Professor of Greek and New Testament Theology at Andersonville Theological Seminary in Camilla, GA*

**Abstract:** Amidst the exciting narratives of the book of Daniel, chapter 3 contains extra elements of drama, displaying the best in historic narratives. The author’s techniques are some of the most basic among a storyteller’s methods: a well-structured plot, good form, poetic expression, and memorable characters. His use of these simple (though not necessarily easy) methods to craft the narrative of this event distinguishes him as a great teacher and a master of literary art. By creating a compelling account from the perspective of a chronicler, the author achieved a two-fold end: 1) to preserve the history of those Jewish leaders that remained faithful to their God during the Babylonian captivity and 2) to reveal to Jew and Gentile alike the nature of God and his care for his faithful servants.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** Daniel, three Hebrew children, fiery furnace, Nebuchadnezzar, storytelling

## Introduction

Daniel 3 is outstanding in the Aramaic portion of the Bible for its storytelling technique.<sup>2</sup> Amidst the exciting narratives of the book of Daniel, chapter 3 contains extra elements of drama, displaying the best in historic narratives. By creating a compelling account from the perspective of a chronicler, the author achieved a two-fold end: 1) to preserve the history of those Jewish leaders that remained faithful to their God during the Babylonian captivity and 2) to reveal to Jew and Gentile alike the nature of God and his care for his faithful servants.<sup>3</sup>

The author of Daniel 3 structured his history in order to focus the reader’s attention on the elements of an event that subtly communicate the desired message without mundane or distracting additions. The author’s techniques are some of the most basic among a storyteller’s methods: a well-structured plot, good form,

1. Martin Luther, “Preface to Daniel,” in *Interpretation of Scripture*, ed. Euan K. Cameron (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 386; also J. N. Schofield, *Law, Prophets, and Writings: The Religion of the Books of the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1969), 341–42.

2. David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 174.

3. Luther, “Preface to Daniel,” 386; also Schofield, *Law, Prophets, and Writings*, 341–42.

poetic expression, and memorable characters. His use of these simple (though not necessarily easy) methods to craft the narrative of this event distinguishes him as a great teacher and a master of literary art.

## **Plot**

### **Setting**

As part of a larger work, the account in Daniel 3 relies on the earlier sections of the book to provide much of the background history.<sup>4</sup> However the introduction of this incident offers enough setting for the story to stand alone.

The story begins with the erection of a giant golden image. The construction of this statue immediately follows Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he was the head of gold (Daniel 2). The exact date of the construction of the image is not provided in the Aramaic text. Whether or not this event immediately followed that of the preceding chapter chronologically, its inclusion at this juncture offers hints as to the author's interpretation or opinion of the origin of Nebuchadnezzar's action.<sup>5</sup> With this setting the author neatly combines both introducing the story and setting it in motion.

### **Structure**

#### *Chronological*

Daniel 3 exhibits excellent plot structure. A long, dramatic beginning is followed by a brief crisis and terminates with a swift conclusion. The author spends approximately one-third of the narrative in setting the stage for the main event he intends to relate. As stated above, the exposition overlaps with the setting from verse 1 continuing through verse 7. The erection of the golden image and the royal summons to all the government officials is described in verses 1-2. The narrator then relates the proceedings of the dedication ceremony including the participants' compliance with the monarch's mandate (vv. 3-7). The announcement of the possible punishment foreshadows the coming contest between the proud king and God's faithful worshippers.

The official accusation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego by some of the Chaldeans (vv. 8-12) is the inciting moment. No motive is stated for this accusation. While the preceding chapters offer possible reasons, the cause of the accusation is not as important here as its results. The rising action creates increasing suspense and provides the greatest amount of foreshadowing (vv. 13-23). The enraged Nebuchadnezzar summons Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who are in effect arrested and brought to the king. Their appearance in court leads to an

4. Gerald Kennedy, "Daniel," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, *Lamentations . . . Malachi*, ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 392.

5. Kennedy, "Daniel," 395.

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intense exchange between the king and the three Hebrew children, resulting in a royal order for the cruelest performance possible of the threatened execution by fire. The carrying out of this order might appear to herald the *dénouement*, but the true crisis suddenly emerges in verses 24-25. Nebuchadnezzar perceives four men walking about in the furnace unaffected by the fire. In one of the most mysterious statements of the Old Testament, the king declares that “the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”<sup>6</sup> The king’s recall of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego from the furnace and the officials’ observation of the perfect preservation of those three men comprises the falling action (vv. 26-27). Nebuchadnezzar proceeds to praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego and issues a royal decree forbidding anyone to “speak anything amiss” against this God. Following this final moment of suspense, Nebuchadnezzar’s promotion of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego together with the king’s psalm to the high God form the real *dénouement*.

### *Chiastic*

With superb artistry the author structured the thought both chronologically and symmetrically (chiastically) at the same time.

King’s action – promotes himself

Royal proclamation – dedication of the golden image

Gathering of the government officials – to view the image and hear the king’s word ordering worship of the image

The king summons Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego on the basis of the accusation

The king defies God

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego resist the king

The king orders the furnace overheated

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego are bound complete with their clothes

The overheated furnace kills the soldiers

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego fall alive into the furnace

The king sees the Son of God in action

The king calls Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego out of the furnace

Gathering of the government officials – to view the complete miracle and hear the king’s word praising God and his servants<sup>7</sup>

Royal proclamation – no blasphemy against this God

The king’s action – promotes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego and their God<sup>8</sup>

6. All translations are by the author.

7. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 185.

8. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 187.

## **Narrative elements**

### **Repetition**

As the chiasmic structure evidences, Daniel 3 contains substantial repetition. In fact, repetition is the key storytelling technique employed in this narrative. This technique intensifies suspense, while maintaining story continuity and overall poetic rhythm.<sup>9</sup> Lists are the most repeated elements of the story, providing detail and serving as a mnemonic device. Three lists in particular are repeated: the types of government officials summoned to the dedication ceremony (two times); the musical instruments that signaled and accompanied the worship (four times); and the names of the three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (eleven times).

The repeated list of government officials provides background and creates suspense at the site of the dedication ceremony. Together with the herald's proclamation of the king's decree, the list format underscores that the presence of these officials at the ceremony was not voluntary or merely the result of great public curiosity. The dedication was an occasion of state to be dignified by the presence of the amassed forces of the aristocracy and bureaucracy. The second complete relation of this list (v. 3) directly following the first enumeration (v. 2) indicates the complete obedience that Nebuchadnezzar was accustomed to receiving.<sup>10</sup> When the assembled officials heard the herald's proclamation followed by the music, they "all . . . fell down and worshipped the golden image." "And all the officials of the provinces probably covers all the officials of lesser rank. This detail so reminiscent of legal phraseology is characteristic of royal inscriptions from Sumerian to Seleucid days . . . Perhaps in these lists the writer is making sly mockery of this, though a love of lists seems to be characteristic of his own style."<sup>11</sup> The use of "all" to mean "every sort," or "most, the vast majority" is well attested in the Old Testament. In this account its use makes the next scene more startling due to the unexpected turn of events. In verse 27 after the three Hebrew children have come out of the furnace, only four categories of political leaders are listed, whereas seven (or eight) had been counted before. At least three of the former positions that are not referenced here ("captains, the judges, the treasurers") are responsible for more technical law enforcement rather than policy-making, which may have made them less interested in citing religious non-conformity before the king. On the other hand, the abbreviated list may incorporate all the types of government officials mentioned now in summary fashion. The exact ranking and positions are no longer important to the message.

9. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 148.

10. Hector I. Avalos, "The Comedic Function of the Enumerations of Officials and Instruments in Daniel 3," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (October, 1991): 585, accessed: 03-12-2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43718347>.

11. Kennedy, "Daniel," 396.

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That is, this latter partial list suggests that the significance of the vast number of government positions listed before was the tremendous pressure their presence and obedience placed on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to compromise. Against the extensive preparation and amassed audience, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's action stands out in sharp relief. Their courage would not have been as vividly highlighted otherwise.

. . . [T]he lengthy lists of officials and musical instruments are neither peripheral nor minor components. Instead, Daniel 3 demonstrates the complex and artistic manner in which lengthy and repeated enumerations could be integrated in a socioreligious critique of pagan social institutions such as the Babylonian government bureaucracy.<sup>12</sup>

Another possibility is that the shorter list may indicate solely the accusers from verse 8, underscoring the complete defeat of their scheme.

The implications of the musical instrument lists will be examined under the poetic elements of the narrative. These lists also provide vivid detail. The names of the three Hebrew children, always given in the same order, likewise form a repeated list in contrast with the lists of the officers and the instruments. All of these lists and their dramatic usage are outstanding in the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> Aside from genealogies, the Old Testament rarely employs lists without annotation; typically lists of items are interspersed with narrative or explanatory sections of text.

However, a few repeated elements of this story are not in a list. "In vs. 5 the heralds proclaim the command; in vs. 10 the accusers repeat it word for word, and in vs. 15 the king again repeats it word for word. To this threefold repetition with rising emphasis there are numerous literary parallels."<sup>14</sup> The phrase "that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up" (with its variations based on the speaker) occurs seven times. This phrase in particular lends poetic rhythm and continuity to the account. In addition the expression subtly points to the true source of the trouble in this situation: Nebuchadnezzar and his swelling pride.

Rather than explaining what the image represents, the narrator spends time repeatedly listing officials and musical instruments. The pomp of the event is given more emphasis than the meaning of the event. And, lest we should forget for even a second, the narrator constantly reminds us that the image is something that 'Nebuchadnezzar the king has erected', thus mocking the king's attempt to be regarded and remembered as a head of gold. Royal insecurity is exposed to all who have eyes to see.<sup>15</sup>

12. Avalos, "Comedic Function," 587.

13. Avalos, "Comedic Function," 588.

14. Kennedy, "Daniel," 399–400.

15. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 177.

## **Detail**

At first reading the details given in this story may appear extravagant: the size of the golden image, the fury of the king, the heat of the furnace, the strength of the soldiers. Nevertheless, a multitude of eye-witnesses were present (a fact emphasized in verse 27). The author's choice of details emphasizes the staggering circumstances that predominate the narrative. The omission of lesser details, drawing the picture with larger, bolder strokes, not only speeds the account along but also renders the story more vivid on the memory. In addition, historic evidence substantiates some of these detailed observations. For example, the staggering size of the image is in keeping with Nebuchadnezzar's many other monumental building projects.<sup>16</sup> Also the records of the temperaments of the Oriental despots from this period agree perfectly with the description of Nebuchadnezzar and his actions.

However the author is not presenting a scientific report or a technical history.<sup>17</sup> He is not merely relating an inspiring incident or a magnificent story. He is in part doing all of the above, but above all he is teaching a lesson. Ironically the author's genius is revealed in his subtle and inseparable didacticism. It is subtle in that the excitement of the narrative carries the reader from point to point without pause. The didacticism is inseparable from the story in that, wherever the adventure is repeated or remembered, the truth it teaches will be clearly represented to the mind of the receiver.

Not only does the author give detailed descriptions of people and material matters, he also gives complete descriptions of the various stages of the narrative. The author was not content with stating that the king ordered the three men to be brought before him. The story element demands that the actual action fulfilling the command be stated. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego did not (probably could not) flee.

The use in v 13 of the *haphel infin.* (להיִתִּיחַ = "to bring") and the *haphel pass.* pf. 3d masc. pl. (הִיִּתְּיוּ = "they were brought") of the verb אָתָּה ("to come") to describe the summoning of the three young men by Nebuchadnezzar emphasizes the involuntary nature of the Jews' actions. Unlike the obsequious officials of vv 2 and 3, and despite their own high rank, the three young Jews are not overly impressed by human authority.<sup>18</sup>

Yet they had to appear before the king. This detail further suggests the steady march of the circumstances: a progression soon clarified as being the providential work of God. As part of communicating this theme, the narrator carefully specifies the circumstances of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's entering the furnace,

16. Raymond J. Hammer, *The Book of Daniel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 39.

17. E. C. Lucas, "Book of Daniel," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 111.

18. Avalos, "Comedic Function," 586.

H.A. Hopgood: *"All Manner of Music:" The Author of Daniel 3 as Master Storyteller* making their release more outstanding. The author is never forceful with his details. He painstakingly fills them in, not only to complete the picture but also to allow the reader to discover the depth of the truth presented as the account progresses. Throughout the narrative the details shape the story, create a mental picture, and lead the reader on to the next scene without ever encumbering the action. The author is not verbose; neither does he succumb to terseness for the sake of brevity. The account is compact yet unhurried. The details are necessary for the reader's understanding of the history. The author's use of them is evidence of his rhetorical skill. This concise dignity is part of the poetic elements of the storyteller's art. Other poetic elements also appear, notably, symbolism, sound, and special syntax.

## Poetic elements

### Symbolism and irony

Few of the imaginative comparisons are directly stated throughout the passage; usually the comparisons are inferred. One direct imaginative comparison employed in describing the dedication ceremony is metonymy. As a notable or characteristic part of a group of people, the term "languages" is used to represent the whole group.<sup>19</sup> However the author primarily creates comparisons through the use of symbols and irony. The first of these symbols occurs in the first verse of the chapter. The measurements of the golden image have symbolic significance: six is the number of man (Rev 13.18). Here the number represents the complete lack of deity on the part of both the image and the king. The golden image is obviously a manifestation of the king's pride, regardless of whether it was actually a statue of himself.

The measurements of the image are not the only numeric symbolism in this account.<sup>20</sup> Seven types of officials are listed (eight if "all the rulers of the provinces" are considered as comprising a separate category). Both the number seven and the number eight are used in the Bible to represent fullness or completeness. The whole of Babylon's political power structure and all the glory of its nobility were present at this occasion.<sup>21</sup> In a similar manner the detailed listing of the three men's garments, which remain on them when they are bound, serves three functions: 1) to illustrate the king's boundless rage and hatred, 2) to foreshadow their amazing deliverance, and 3) to suggest that God's protection covered them throughout all they underwent.

Foreshadowing, which occurs throughout the chapter (as already mentioned), offers the greatest amount of poetic irony. The chiasmic structure relies heavily on

19. Hammar, *Book of Daniel*, 40.

20. Steven Barabas, "Numbers," in *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 590.

21. Hammar, *Book of Daniel*, 40.



foreshadowing and unexpected opposites.<sup>22</sup> For example, the account begins with King Nebuchadnezzar promoting himself and his religion. It ends with Nebuchadnezzar promoting Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego and their God. At the beginning of the story, the herald gives the king's decree regarding worshipping to the accompanying music, which decree is repeated two other times during the rising action. At the end, the king is singing praise to the God of Heaven. Notwithstanding, the greatest single instance of irony is that the extra hot furnace slays the mightiest men in the army but not the three Hebrew children or even the king. This contrast between natural and supernatural effects of the fire greatly aids in communicating the intended message.

### **Sound and syntax**

In addition to symbolism and irony, the author uses an unusually large vocabulary selection for biblical Aramaic. Although most of the rare terms are in the repeated lists of officials and instruments, others are not. Verses 8 and 12 are the first chronological occurrence of the Aramaic term “Jews” (יהודיא) from the time of the exile. Apparently originating as a foreign or Gentile designation among the Arameans (2 Kgs 16.6), this nomenclature came to be standard among the Hebrews themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Another example of unusual syntax is the simultaneous use of the related terms “burning fiery furnace.” This duplication of related terms is even less common in Aramaic than in Hebrew. Each time the Chaldeans refer to the furnace they use all three words (אתון נורא יקדתא), apparently an idiomatic expression. The narrator used the complete phrase as well as the term “furnace” (אתון) by itself, pointing to the strong possibility that the narrator was not a Chaldean or native speaker of Aramaic. Hebrew does not require these terms to be combined. That the expression “burning fiery furnace” is one of the phrases repeated throughout the account indicates its importance to the story, as noted above. The “burning fiery furnace” reflects the inner life of the king almost as much as his words and actions do. The author uses physical descriptions of Nebuchadnezzar to poetically connect the king's rage with the symbolic nature of the deadly torture he has chosen. Thus the conclusion points beyond the isolated occurrence of the miracle to a universal truth: God is more powerful than human anger and pride can ever be.

Two other instances of symbolic syntax both revolve around the king's response to the three Hebrews' courtroom reply. In describing the physical effects of rage on the king's face, the narrator states that Nebuchadnezzar's countenance or “image” was changed toward the three Hebrew children. This term “image” (צלם) is the same as is employed for the golden statue.<sup>24</sup> This verbal connection is a type of serious pun, underscoring the real power and powerlessness of the statue. Later, when the

22. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 183–84.

23. See Ezra 5:1; Neh 1:2; Est 4:13–14; Jer 32:12; Matt 28:15.

24. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 182.

three Hebrews emerge from the furnace, no change had occurred in their clothing while they had been in the fire. The word "changed" is another form of the verb "used of the monarch's face being distorted by rage."<sup>25</sup> This repetition emphasizes whose character is impacted by the course of events. In attempting to force his will on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, King Nebuchadnezzar places himself under great pressure. Refusing to submit to God as supreme sovereign, Nebuchadnezzar succumbs to his own weakness in failing to control himself. The ironic employment of these symbolic terms conveys the author's message with potent immediacy.

Repetition, theme, irony, unusual syntax, and exceptional use of sound all come together in the relation of music and musical instruments. These are little heard-of instruments. In fact the word for trumpet (קרנא) is only in the book of Daniel; while flute (משרוקיתא), harp (קיתרוס), lyre (סבכא), psaltery (פסנתרין), and bagpipes (סומפניה)<sup>26</sup> are the only occurrences in the Bible. In the first half of the narrative, all the musical instruments are inseparably linked to the idolatrous worship (vv. 5, 7, and 15). Within the context of the entire Old Testament, this connection is quite ironic since the Babylonians referred to the Jewish sacred music as exceptional (Ps 137.1-3). This connection of music and worship provides the backdrop for two of Nebuchadnezzar's sacred poems in praise of the high God of Heaven. These poems form the crowning point of the account both narratively and literarily. As king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar was a highly educated man; but more than that he was a gifted poet. A comparison of this royal writing with the Aramaic royal decrees in the book of Ezra and the other official decrees in the book of Daniel demonstrates that Nebuchadnezzar was writing in a different genre in these sections than the usual decrees. His decree in verse 29, enclosed between the two poetic sections, is given in typical (perhaps legally technical) language until the last phrase where the king returns to the poetic theme and form of his psalm. The two short psalms of King Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 28 and 32-33 [English 4.2-3]) contain alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, and heavy rhythm. The most fascinating device Nebuchadnezzar uses is word plays on the Chaldean names of the three Hebrews: שדרך "Shadrach" and שלה "sent"; מישך "Meshach" and מלאכה "his angel"; עבד נגו "Abed-nego" and עבדוהי "his servants". Verses 31-33 (English 4.1-3) belong poetically with 3.28-30 and thematically with chapter 4, forming a seamless transition between the two accounts.<sup>27</sup>

25. Kennedy, "Daniel," 404.

26. Or, "*singing*. Chald. *symphony*"—AV alternate translation in *The Westminster Reference Bible* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, n.d.).

27. Marvin A. Sweeney, *Tanak: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 452.

## **Character Development**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego together form the protagonist, and their unchanging character creates the backbone of the story.<sup>28</sup> Verse 12 gives the official titles or positions of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, which explains why they were present at the dedication ceremony. They had been specifically summoned. The author uses direct speech as the main means of developing his characters and outlining the conflict between them. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's only recorded words in this account are their official response to the accusation when they are haled before the king for refusing to worship the image.<sup>29</sup> The noble courage of the three Hebrew children is skillfully represented through their bold reply that matches the king's audacious threat, as noted before. The author pictures for the reader the calm of the three Hebrews in the presence of a king overflowing with fury. "The quiet determination of their reply is very striking and beautiful."<sup>30</sup> Respectful but direct, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego omit the standard courtly address, "O king, live forever" (v. 9). The structure of the courtroom exchange of challenges is noteworthy. The Hebrews' answer (vv. 16-17) is the exact inverse of order from the king's outburst. He began with the image and music, proceeded to the furnace, and concluded with a direct challenge against their (or any) God. They begin by answering the challenge against their God, relate that answer to the furnace and conclude by refusing to worship the image. This miniature chiasm forms the crux of the story although the crisis continues to build.

While the three Hebrew children are the obvious heroes of the story, the antagonist King Nebuchadnezzar is the most dynamic character, undergoing a life-changing experience in the crisis of the story.<sup>31</sup> Just as God had warned the Jews about the Chaldeans' hasty dispositions (Hab. 1.6), Nebuchadnezzar's emotions predominate his decisions.

Nebuchadnezzar's vehement address to the three culprits is very characteristic and instructive. Fixed determination to enforce his mandate, anger which breaks into threats that were by no means idle, and a certain wish to build a bridge for the escape of servants who had done their work well, are curiously mingled in it.<sup>32</sup>

His words (he has the most lines of direct speech) and his actions alike trace his personal development from proud and arrogant to awestruck and worshipful. Pivotal to this change is the king's direct encounter with the person of God. Apparently Nebuchadnezzar is the only Chaldean to perceive the fourth man in the furnace. No courtier notices him or readily understands the king's shock. "The story shifts its

28. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 185.

29. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 185.

30. Alexander Maclaren, *The Books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets* (New York: A. C. Armstrong, 1909), 58.

31. Gunn and Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 185–86.

32. Maclaren, *Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets*, 56.

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point of view with very picturesque abruptness after verse 27. The vaunting king shall tell what he saw, and thereby convict himself of insolent folly in challenging 'any god' to deliver out of his hand. He alone seems to have seen the sight, which he tells to his courtiers."<sup>33</sup> This spiritual revelation is one of several instances where God revealed himself to King Nebuchadnezzar as to few pagan monarchs. Nebuchadnezzar received more direct communication from God than any other non-Jewish king recorded in Scripture. In fact the phrase "Son of God" does not appear anywhere else in the Old Testament. The interpretation of this appearance has been the subject of much debate. However the term "angel" later used to describe the fourth figure in the furnace does not necessarily make the spiritual being less than God.<sup>34</sup>

Although the three Hebrew children and Nebuchadnezzar are the most obvious characters developed in this story, God's rare, physically observable appearance obviates his participation in, as well as control of, the events involving his servants. Overcoming the antagonist is the central feature or desire in the greatest majority of stories. Overcoming a bitter antagonist by converting him into an adoring subject is the surprise ending of this remarkable tale. King Nebuchadnezzar's personal interaction with God is part of the larger history in the book of Daniel. Each encounter with God continues to change Nebuchadnezzar slightly, eventually developing a working relationship between the king of Babylon and the King of Heaven. But that is another story.

## Conclusion

Throughout his account the author of Daniel 3 chose classic storytelling techniques to communicate an extraordinary message. Literary devices such as vivid detail, poetic irony, and word plays create memorable characters that interact in a swift but carefully structured plot. All of these elements support and propel the narrative without drawing undue attention to themselves or the author. In presenting a record of God's miraculous deliverance of those that trusted in him unwaveringly, the author of Daniel 3 presents a piece of great literary art that continues to delight as well as instruct his readers today.

33. Maclaren, *Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Minor Prophets*, 61.

34. Exod 23:20–22 enigmatically depicts an angel as the same as God; arguments concerning the term "the angel of the Lord" would apply here.

