

# Daniel 3:25

"the Son of God" or "a son of the gods"?

by Martin A. Shue

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Recently I was engaged in a debate as to the correct reading of Dan. 3:25. Specifically we were debating what Nebuchadnezzar said when he saw the fourth Man in the furnace. The modern versions read that Nebuchadnezzar said, "the fourth is like a son of the gods". The Authorized Version reads, "the fourth is like the Son of God". Quite a big difference wouldn't you say? For this article I decided to reproduce some of the main parts of our debate. In the interest of brevity I have had to truncate it somewhat. However, even with doing that it is still rather long so I decided to send it out in two parts. Part two will follow next week. My opponents rebuttal will be in blue letters and will be contained in arrows >> <<. As you will see he had very little to say in regards to the evidence I presented him. I will make a few remarks as we go along for the sake of this article. They will be denoted by brackets [ ] and where not part of the original debate.

I originally posted numerous verses that clearly showed how the modern versions parallel the corrupt New World Translation (Jehovah's Witness translation). One of those verses was Dan. 3:25. Out of the long list I presented my opponent choose to comment on only one verse (i.e. Dan. 3:25). No one else choose to respond to my post. Following is what ensued----

>>But Shue-as for one of your arguments- Nebuchadnezzar had NO idea who the Son of God is! The translators were using their hindsight.<<

I have found that it is very common among the Alexandrians, when confronted with the absurd reading of Dan. 3:25, to say that Nebuchadnezzar had no concept of God and that he was a pagan idol worshipper. Thus, they conclude that he could not have said, "the Son of God" in order to ease their conscience of the blasphemous reading found in the MVs. But where is the EVIDENCE for their theory? I shall set forth the evidence for the fact that Nebuchadnezzar did in fact have a good concept of God and even knew of the Son of God (Messiah) then you are invited to refute it with the evidence that supports your statement. I shall endeavor to be as brief as I can.

[My original evidence here contained 6 points.]

1) As you know Nebuchadnezzar ordered that they should bring "certain of the children of Israel" that

they might teach them the "learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans". Of course among this group of young men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Unto whom they quickly changed their names to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Why would they change their names? As you may know names were very important in Biblical days and carried great meaning, much unlike today. So a quick study of their names may be to our advantage here. The name Daniel means "God is Judge", Hananiah means "Gift of the Lord", Mishael means "Who is what God is", and Azariah means "Whom Jehovah helps". Some rather powerful statements made by their names don't you think? Now we can see why they wanted to change their names. So again we see that just by their very names Nebuchadnezzar would have had a good "concept" of God, so much so that he changed their names. But we're not finished yet!

2) In chapter 2 we find that Nebuchadnezzar has dreamed a dream and there is none to tell him his dream and the interpretation of it. However, just before he kills all the wise men "was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision" (Dan. 2:19). Daniel is then brought in before the king to make known his dream. Daniel starts by saying that none of the wise men could make known the king's dream, **GET THIS NOW**, "But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." (Dan. 2:28) As mentioned before Daniel is always quick to give God all the credit. This I am sure they did on many other matters that the king inquired of them. Daniel continues in verse 37, "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory." Here Daniel makes it clear that it is the "God of heaven" that has given Nebuchadnezzar his kingdom not one of his false gods. Again, giving Nebuchadnezzar a definite "concept" of who God is. And if this isn't enough there's more.

3) This is the part I find really interesting. Remember the image was "broken to pieces" by a stone "cut out without hands". So what exactly is this "stone". Daniel makes it clear to Nebuchadnezzar what, or who, this stone was. Daniel states, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed:...and it shall stand for ever." (Dan. 2:44) He continues, "Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter" (Dan. 2:45). **WOW!** Imagine that, Nebuchadnezzar was given a clear picture of the Messiah (the Son of God) and His Kingdom. So it is becoming more evident that Nebuchadnezzar in fact had a good concept of God and even knew about Messiah's Kingdom. To further illustrate this point we shall refer to Nebuchadnezzar's own words. He says, "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret." (Dan. 2:47)

In light of all these facts it is highly probable, yea certain, that when Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth Man in the furnace he indeed recognized Him as "the Son of God" and not "a son of the gods" as the MVs so falsely read (which again I remind you is exactly the way the NWT reads). Especially since Daniel and his 3 friends had bore such a good witness to him.

>>I'm sure that daniel & friends were fully supportive of Nebuchadnezzar since they were familiar with prophecy concerning their exile,& the other short-term prophecies concerning him& his empire,& they

truly were trying to witness to him, Old Covenant style. He paid lip service to God when He gave Daniel his dream & the meaning of it-but at the time, that's far as Neb's righteousness went. The names he'd given those Jews showed his pagan beliefs (Belteshazzar for Daniel-of the false Chaldean god Bel) Now if he'd been truly righteous, he would never have set up the image on the plain of Dura that led to the furnace incident. And he would've heeded Daniel's interpretation of the dream that forecast his punishment for failing to worship and praise God, Who made him what he was. At the time of the furnace incident, Neb was still a pagan at heart. Although the four Jews had tried to impart their knowledge of God to him.<<

Thanks for your reply. Albeit, you fall WAY short in 1) Refuting my evidence that Nebuchadnezzar had ample enough understanding of God and His Son to identify the fourth Man in the furnace as "the Son of God". 2) Producing ANY evidence that supports the inane reading of "the son of the gods".

In your second post you seem to take on a completely different approach to your reasoning. In it you seem to try to say that because Nebuchadnezzar wasn't "truly righteous" that he couldn't possibly have said "the Son of God". This is simply unacceptable reasoning. One doesn't have to be "righteous" in order to recognize the Son of God or the things of God. This is proven time after time throughout the Bible. So, this type of reasoning is very faulty.

I am not saying that Nebuchadnezzar was a 'believer' when he threw the 3 men in the furnace. But I would also remind you that that is not really the question before us. We are not discussing whether or not Nebuchadnezzar was a believer but rather that he had a good enough understanding of Who the true God was to identify the fourth Man in the fire as "the Son of God". To this I would say that MORE than enough evidence has been presented to confirm this fact.

Since I was almost sure that you would take the 'party line' (which you did) and jump from he couldn't have said "the Son of God" because he didn't know enough about God to say that, to he couldn't have said it because he was a "pagan at heart" and not "truly righteous", I purposefully saved something just for that.

So, let's take it a step further. Perhaps a look at what Nebuchadnezzar had to say after the 3 men came out of the fire may help us. If we look at verse 26 we see Nebuchadnezzar say, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego ye servants of the MOST HIGH GOD". This he said of his own accord without the assistance from anyone. He goes on to say, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego" (V.28) Here again without any testimony from the 3 men he recognizes that it is GOD that has saved the men alive. Now here is what I really want you to see. He further states, "who hath sent HIS ANGEL, and delivered his servants that trusted in him". (V.28)(caps mine) This is very revealing as to who Nebuchadnezzar thought the fourth Man in the fire was. After all don't you think if he actually said "a son of the gods", as the modern versions read, that he would have said something like "one of the gods has sent his son...". But we know that he didn't, he plainly says that GOD HATH SENT HIS ANGEL. Again, no one has told him what has happened. He came to these conclusions on his own. So, I would submit, that if he recognized the Man as an Angel of God he would have said "the Son of God". In light

of all this it is much more highly likely that he would have said "the Son of God" than he would have "a son of the gods".

>>Again,a good,solid,scholarly approach,which I respect you for-but again you apply the wrong logic,trying to make a point.Neb DID say,"HIS ANGEL." If it was as you said earlier,surely Neb would've known the Son of God from an angel. And you still haven't addressed HOW Neb would've known God has a Son.<<

While what you have said may APPEAR to be a valid argument it only shows that "ye do err, not knowing the scriptures". Contrary to what you say, the fact that Nebuchadnezzar called Him "HIS ANGEL" is irrefutable evidence that he recognized Him as "the Son of God". Consider the following:

[My original evidence here contained 5 points]

1) In Gen. 31:11-13 we encounter the "angel" again. Here we read, "And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. 12 And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstreaked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred." Here He is called "the angel of God" then He identifies Himself in v.13 as "the God of Bethel". Once again, we see that this "angel" is one member of the Divine Trinity---the pre-incarnate Christ. We pass on---

2)We come upon this "angel" again in Ex. 3. We read in v. 2, "And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush:". Verse 4 continues, "And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I." Now, did you pick up on that? This "angel of the LORD" is called "the LORD" and "God" in v.4. He further identifies Himself in v.6 by saying, "Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." I believe that is plenty clear enough as to Who this "angel" is.

3) In Ex. 23:20-23 we find something very interesting. I will quote only v.20-21 but do read 22-23, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. 21 Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him." Here we see that God is going to send "an Angel" before Israel and that His "name is in him". Now, before we draw any conclusions about Who this "Angel" was let's also look at Judges 2:1-3. We shall only look at v.1 which reads, "And an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you." (please read vs.2-3) Now we see that this "angel" led them out of Egypt and has brought them into the land "which I SWARE unto your fathers" further He says, "I WILL never break my covenant with you." This "angel" clearly identifies Himself as a member of the Divine Trinity. If that were not enough Paul plainly tells us "for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." Again, we see that

this "angel" is none other than the pre-incarnate Christ.

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of" Balaam and the "angel of the LORD" (Num. 22:22-41), of Gideon and the "angel of the LORD" (Judges 6:11-22), of Manoah and his wife and the "angel of the LORD" (Judges 13), of Elijah and the "angel of the LORD" (I and II Kings), and many others.

I have also not mentioned the time "three men" met Abraham in the plains of Mamre (Gen. 18), who was withoutdoubt the LORD. Nor have I mentioned the time "a man" confronted Joshua (Josh. 5:15), who was none other than the "Captain of the LORD'S host". Nor the time Jacob wrestled with "a man". You will certainly want to note that Hosea 12:2-5 identifies this "man" as an "angel" and calls Him "God".

Now I am not saying that every time an angel is mentioned in scripture it is a member of the Divine Trinity. However, as you can see MANY times this "angel of the LORD" is indeed a member of the Divine Trinity---the pre-incarnate Christ. So, having proved this I would once again claim your statements, not as evidence against the reading "the Son of God", but rather evidence FOR the reading. It would have been in perfect harmony with the rest of scripture for Nebuchadnezzar to call the fourth Man in the furnace "the Son of God" and then to also call him "HIS ANGEL". I would remind you again, the fact that he said "HIS ANGEL" is absolute proof that he did not say "a son of the gods".

[Here I simply quote what he originally said in order to answer him]

>>And you still haven't addressed HOW Neb would've known God has a Son<<

I would submit to you that he knew and identified Him in just the same way that the afore mentioned knew when they had an encounter with the "angel of the LORD". I will now yield to the Early Church Father Hippolytus (A.D. 190-227)---

[Here is some absolutely DEVASTATING evidence to him and the modern versions. As you will notice he never even acknowledges this evidence.]

"And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Tell me, Nebuchadnezzar, when didst thou see the Son of God, that thou shouldst confess that this is the Son of God? And who pricked thy heart, that thou shouldst utter such a word? And with what eyes wert thou able to look into this light? And why was this manifested to thee alone, and to none of the satraps about thee? But, as it is written, "The heart of a king is in the hand of God:" the hand of God is here, whereby the Word pricked his heart, so that he might recognize Him in the furnace, and glorify Him. And this idea of ours is not without good ground. For as the children of Israel were destined to see God in the world, and yet not to believe on Him, the Scripture showed beforehand that the Gentiles would recognize Him incarnate, whom, while not incarnate, Nebuchadnezzar saw and recognized of old in the furnace, and acknowledged to be the Son of God." (Hippolytus, Scholia on Daniel c. iii. 92)

Along with his explanation of how Nebuchadnezzar recognized Him I would also invite you to observe that Hippolytus was most familiar with the reading "the Son of God" and also considered it the CORRECT reading. I would also call two other witnesses for the reading "the Son of God"----

"Now this is the Son of God, as the Scripture represents Nebuchadnezzar the king as having said, "Did not we cast three men bound into the furnace? and, lo, I do see four walking in the midst of the fire, and the fourth is like the Son of God." (Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202), Against Heresies 5:5:2)

Again we see that Irenaeus was familiar with the reading "the Son of God" and considered it the authentic reading.

"Nebuchadnezzar himself, having ordered three men to be cast into fire, saw a fourth when he looked into the furnace, and said, 'I see the fourth as the Son of God.'" (The Clementine Homilies, Homily 17 ch.17)

Now, once again I have given you, what I would consider, OVERWHELMING evidence that the reading in the AV is correct while the reading in the MVs is utterly preposterous. Also, to this point I have yet to see where you have provided any substantial evidence that would support such a farcical reading as "a son of the gods".[sic]

[Notice the following rebuttal he gives to the evidence presented to him. I have not truncated his response. This is actually all he had to say.]

>>But Shue-If Nebuchadnezzar had had a great enough understanding of God at the time of the furnace incident to know of just a trace of God's power,he would never have built the image on the plain of Dura,would he?<<

P----, I must admit that I was highly disappointed when I read your response to my posts. I refuted your last claim with more than sufficient EVIDENCE (much more than I had intended). Then I find that you answer with the above. You did not even attempt to address ANY of my points. I believe I adequately proved that the pre-incarnate Christ was often identified by the term "angel". Your claim was that if Nebuchadnezzar recognized Him as "the Son of God" then he wouldn't have also referred to Him as "HIS ANGEL". At the risk of being pleonastic, I remind you again that God the Father even called Him "MINE ANGEL" (Ex. 23:23). Now, surely you wouldn't accuse God of not knowing His Son because He called Him "MINE ANGEL". Your argument just doesn't hold up when examined by God's word.

As for your latest 'argument', I have already covered this some time back. This is really not a new argument but one of your first just worded a little different. But I will oblige you yet again. I would again say at the outset that your 'argument' is really baseless and has no logic to it. Further it has NO bearing whatsoever as to whether Nebuchadnezzar said "the Son of God" or "a son of the gods". [sic] Consider

the following:

1) The children of Israel, who were bond in slavery in Egypt, have been eyewitnesses to "God's power". They have seen the awful plagues that God wrought in Egypt, they saw the Red Sea parted, they gathered the manna, they drank of the water from the rock when there was no water, they were present when God descended on mount Sinai with "thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud...the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly.", et al. So, I would say that they knew much more than just a "trace of God's power". Yet, having witnessed all this we find in Exodus 32:4 that they give their golden earrings to Aaron in order to make a "molten calf". Just two days before these people had been serving God. But now they "offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings;" to their new god, which they said "brought thee up out of the land of Egypt".

You see P----, your argument is really irrelevant. These people certainly knew God's power but they fashioned a molten calf anyway. So, because Nebuchadnezzar built the image does not mean that he did not have an understanding of God's power and it CERTAINLY doesn't prove that he said "a son of the gods" which is what you are SUPPOSED to be trying to prove. P----, you already admit that there are errors in the MVs so why not just admit that this is another error in the MVs. If you are not willing to do this then at least provide us with some SOLID EVIDENCE for the reading of the MVs. Thus far your assertion has not faired to well.

[With all his arguments refuted he now tries to fall back on "the Hebrew". I would also like to point out that his "hebrew-reading friend" is an unregenerate Jew. Now would one really expect an unregenerate Jew to agree that Nebuchadnezzar said "the Son of God". How ridiculous can you be! But yet at the same time it shows to what great lengths those that support the modern versions must go in order to try and cover up the enormous "blunders" in their versions.]

>>As I said before,shue- a hebrew-reading friend of mine told me how the passage reads-"a son of the gods". Now if it indeed read,"Son of God" in the old manuscripts,you'd never hear a peep of argument about it from me. That's the point YOU missed-the Hebrew reading.<<

On the contrary, I have not MISSED the Hebrew reading. I believe it is you that has been misled by your SO-CALLED Hebrew reading friend.

Okay, here goes. The Hebrew in Dan. 3:25 reads "Ibar-Elaheen". It is certainly meant to be rendered as "Son of God." In the first place, the "Ibar" is a masculine SINGULAR absolute, and "Elaheen" is a dual form, which is almost always translated as a SINGULAR throughout the Bible. If that's not convincing enough for you, the so-called Septuagint (LXX) also translated it as the AV, i.e., "uiw Theou" - SINGULAR - "Son of God." Being the expert scholars that they were the KJ translators knew this and rightly translated "Ibar-Elaheen" as "Son of God". The Geneva translators knew this also for they translated the verse as follows:

"He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

P----, it would appear that you have run out of arguments. I am puzzled as to why you are unwilling to simply admit that the MVs are corrupt in this verse. I believe it is pretty obvious to you and the other on lookers that the evidence is OVERWHELMINGLY against you and the MVs reading. Perhaps after this post we can reach an agreement that the AV reading is correct and move on to another topic. For I believe that we have just about exhausted this subject and should we continue we run a great risk of abusing our reader's patience.

If you are so inclined as to be able to produce, for the first time, some SOLID EVIDENCE for the reading "a son of the gods" I will gladly hear you out. But as I have said, thus far you have yet to provide any evidence that would support the reading of the MVs. Maybe now that the Hebrew has been answered we can put Dan. 3:25 to rest.

-----End of Debate-----

In closing, I would like to say that my final post was never answered although my opponent still posts in that club. He has never provided ANY evidence for the absurd reading of the modern versions and in spite of all the evidence he never admitted that the Authorized Version's reading is correct. I hope that you have found this exchange informative. As I believe you will agree, once again the Authorized Version has been shown to be far superior than the corrupt modern versions.

Stablish thy word unto thy servant, who is  
devoted to thy fear.  
Psalms 119:38