

Confessing the Faith in the Face of Death

And the God Who Saves Us From the Fiery Furnace

ESV Daniel 3:1 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**.

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."

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 3:1-30)

Politics and Religion

G. K. Chesterton once said, “I have heard that in some debating clubs there is a rule that the members may discuss anything except religion and politics. I cannot imagine what they do discuss; but it is quite evident that they have ruled out the only two subjects which are either important or amusing. The thing is a part of a certain modern tendency to avoid things because they lead to warmth; whereas, obviously, we ought, even in a social sense, to seek those things specially.”¹ “I never discuss anything except politics and religion. There is nothing else to discuss.”²

The book of Daniel is very much on the side of Chesterton. Daniel understood that not only are these two subjects important, their playing off one another is both unavoidable and inevitable. For a time, people may try to suppress one or the other, but such suppression cannot last. God made human beings in his own image and as such we are singular creatures of both government and religion. God made us to worship and he made us to rule. On one level or

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *Appreciation and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (London: J. M. Dent and sons, 1911), 169.

² G. K. Chesterton, “Being Weary of Creeds,” in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* vol. 27 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 25.

another, be it the king of a country or a mother teaching her children, government with law and order is something everyone practices. To one degree or another, be it in a formal church or in an atheist pumping iron in a gym and gawking at himself in the mirror, the worship of *something* is compulsory.

For all of history, **religion and government have been married together**. Whether it is Egypt or Babylon, Greece or Rome, The Holy Roman Empire or Lutheran Germany, or even the United States with its First Amendment or Communist China with its omnipresent pictures of Chairman Mao, there is an inescapable marriage between religion and politics. **The only real question** is, will a government keep its proper place and enact laws that keep its citizens free to worship God or will it assert itself over God and impose a certain kind of worship of the state and its gods upon the people?

It is only when we come to this realization and figure out that we must move beyond the fear of talking about religion and politics that we can have any hope of thinking properly about the two together and preparing ourselves for how we can properly and biblically react as Christians when

the state inevitably usurps its powers. We are at the present moment at the most dangerous precipice our nation has faced since the Civil War. The loss of the Republic and its **First Amendment rights** are a clear and present danger. At the heart of this is exactly this question. As Christians, Daniel 3 is one of those places that can very much help us think soberly about these subjects, while also giving us great encouragement in the days ahead.

Daniel 3: Overview and Structure

This chapter contains **one of the most famous stories ever told**. It is full of **politics** and the power of faith. It concerns the king of Babylon who erects a giant image and mandates its **worship** upon all the citizens. In response, three faithful Jewish men defy the king, procure his wrath, and are thrown into a **fiery furnace** to be incinerated for treason and sedition. What happens next is the stuff of such legend that unbelievers tout the entire story as make-believe. Yet, the Holy Scripture in a place full of historical commentary says that “**through faith**” they “**quenched the violence of fire**” (**Heb 11:33-34**).

As with most if not all of the chapters in the book, we can look at it **linearly** or **chiastically**. I like Sinclair Ferguson's linear outline, because it really highlights the **political totalitarianism** and **religious persecution** found throughout the chapter. It also brings out the **trials of faith** that God brings into the lives of his people, even after he blesses them with material wealth and political power.

Totalitarianism (3:1–7)

Obeying God Rather than Men (3:8–18)

Through Fiery Trials (3:19–25)

Impressed Once More (3:26–30)³

Chiastically, the chapter can be divided into **seven sections**⁴ which centers upon and thus **highlights the faith** of the men of God and their bold and very public defiance of a king who is usurping his God-given power in the realm of religious freedom.

³ **Sinclair B. Ferguson** and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Daniel*, vol. 21, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1988), 61.

⁴ An alternative sees five sections (**vv. 1-3, 4-12, 13-19, 20-27, 28-30**) and subdivides these into five separate chiasms. See "Daniel 3," *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Sept 21, 2015), <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2015/09/21/daniel-31-30/>. In this scheme, **vs. 16** is the center of the chapter.

- A. Nebuchadnezzar's God and Decree (3:1-7)
- B. Living in the Fiery Furnace of Babylon: Politics Usurping God (3:8-12)
- C. The King's Rage and Threats Against the Men of God (3:13-15)
- D. **Confession of Faith in God (3:16-18)**
- C¹. The King's Rage and Carrying out the Treats (3:19-23)
- B'. Living in a Literal Fiery Furnace: Christ and the Spirit Usurp the King (3:24-27)
- A'. Nebuchadnezzar's New Decree about the True God (3:27-30)⁵

This chief question being addressed is, “**Will the image of God that [God] has made (cf. Gen 1:26–27) bow to the image which man has made?**”⁶ As such, we are dealing with ideas that began in ch. 2 which we can easily see by looking at the first verse of our story.

Totalitarianism: Nebuchadnezzar's God and Decree (vv. 1-7)

It begins by telling us that “**King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold**” (**Dan 3:1**). We saw the word “**image**” (*tselem*) in **2:31** where Daniel told the king that he had a

⁵ For this basic structure see the untitled and anonymous outline here: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GtGFxQQML6v9nsvZID8FWRTE1C2UWPxm/view>.

⁶ Ferguson, 61–62.

terrifying dream of “a great image” with a “head of gold” (32). Of course, that image was not all gold, but graduated to silver, bronze, iron, and clay as it descended downward. This new statue now is all gold.

The purpose of the dream was to humble the king by showing him that there is a God in heaven who is powerful enough to interpret his dream, tell the king his dream through someone who could not have known it, and in fact give the king this dream so that he might know the future and bow himself before the Most High. We saw that the king did confess this God to be “God of gods and Lord of kings.” But his confession was not combined with faith in God. Ferguson notices something important here about the king now erecting this statue. “Had Nebuchadnezzar wanted to memorialize the revelation God had given him—namely, to point out that only the kingdom God builds cannot be shaken—he would have built an image with a head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. Beside it he would have placed a large stone. Apparently

Nebuchadnezzar resisted God’s revelation.”⁷ James Boice concludes,

When the story is read with the vision of the statue of chapter 2 in view, one realizes that the later episode actually shows Nebuchadnezzar rebelling against God’s decree. God had said, “Your kingdom will be succeeded by other kingdoms, kingdoms of silver, brass and iron.” Nebuchadnezzar replied, “No, my kingdom will endure; it will always be glorious. I will create a statue of which not only the head will be of gold, but the shoulders, thighs and legs also. It will all be of gold, for it will represent me and my descendants forever.” This personal involvement with the statue explains the king’s violent reaction when the three Jewish men refused to bow down to it.⁸

Nebuchadnezzar’s rebellion was grand indeed. It tells us that the height of the statue was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. This makes the statue 90 ft x 9 ft. Other gigantic statues were known in antiquity, such as the great colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world,

⁷ Ferguson, 63.

⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 411–412.



which was approx. 105 ft. Since the proportions here are odd for a statue of a human figure (we are approx. 5-1 not 10-1), these numbers may be symbolic. However, ancient steles (left) demonstrate,⁹ it was common to put a figure on top of a pillar. This would make the proportions of the figure realistic while maintaining the size.

The image was probably of a god like Marduk and not of Nebuchadnezzar (see vv. 12, 14, 18, 28, 29), because the story will tell us that the point of the image was to force people to bow down to gods. Therefore, what we have here is a good old-fashioned idol which the king set up on the plain of Dura near Babylon. Curiously, it tells us six times in seven verses that Nebuchadnezzar “set up” the image. Why did he do this?

As I just said, it was to force the people to worship it. “Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the

⁹ This grave stele from about 530 B.C. illustrates the concept of putting a figure on the top of a high pedestal. The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY. Source: John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 536.

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” (Dan 3:2). In chapters 1-2, it was the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans that were in view. These were the *religious guilds* of Babylon. Now it is the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, and officials. This is the *politics, the government* of Babylon. Why?

I believe there are several answers to this. *First*, it is a form of *blackmail and forced compromise*. If you get the government officials to bow their knee to your god, then you have power over them. Here, it is taking place *at the dedication* of the idol, and at such a thing they would be participants in the magic and musical ritual that accompanied bringing the deity into its new place of residence. If they participated in the event, they will be more prone to be loyal to the deity and his earthly king. This is exactly what we find them doing in *vs. 3* when it says they, *“Gathered for the dedication of the image ... [and] stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”*

Second, it is a way of putting *the population* into a kind of religious slavery and demonic oppression. Paul gives a direct new covenant application to this kind of thing when he talks to the Corinthians about drinking the cup of demons or of Christ. “I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons” (1Co 10:20).

In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, start with the government, move to the people. This is in mind in vv. 4-5. “And the herald proclaimed aloud, ‘You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 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.’” This is the destruction of religious liberty, the usurping of political will over the will of God. This is tyranny of the most horrible kind set to a drumbeat of a pagan religious worship service, music transforming the mind into emotion, putting the people into a trance like state, demonically moving them to fall down and worship.

There is a profound relevance here in several things taking place before our eyes, but I want to highlight one

particular evil in our own day that few even suspect. This is exactly what we are seeing happen through Black Lives Matter as people are being forced by mobs to literally bow before the raised fist on streets or at sporting events, or more metaphorically in board rooms and school boards throughout the nation. And it is deeply religious, as the leaders themselves admit. But don't take my word for it.

Many think this is just about fighting racism. Not in their words it isn't. **Patrisse Cullors**, co-founder of the movement admits on one hand that, "We are trained Marxists." And yet in the next breath, "Spirituality is at the center of Black Lives Matter ... I don't think I could do this work without it. If I didn't do that it would be antithetical to this work ... We aren't just having a social justice movement. This is a spiritual movement." What kind of spirituality? She says, "Hashtags for us is way more than a hashtag. It is literally almost resurrecting spirits so they can work through us so we can get the work done that we need to get done."

She talking about the dark voodoo West African and Caribbean Island religion called *Odu Ifá*, with its ancestor worship which summons dead spirits for power to carry out

their own dark mischief in the world of men. Basically, it's [witchcraft](#). Melina Abdulla, Professor of Pan-African Studies at Cal State and founder of the BLM LA chapter says,

We become very [intimate with the spirits](#) that we call on regularly. Each of them seems to have a different presence and personality ... We come out in the streets and we pray. You know the first thing that we do when we hear of a murder is we come out, we pray, we pour libation we built with the community ... It took me almost a year to realize that this movement is much more than a racial and social justice movement. At its core it's a [spiritual movement](#), because we're literally standing on spilled blood, and you can't pretend that that's mere community organizing ... When we say the names, so we speak their names ... we do that all the time. You kind of invoke that spirit and the spirits actually becomes present with you.

She is talking about summoning the power of the dead. Abraham Hamilton, III said, “[You all see all of this, the NBA all on the jersey's, say her name. They're not doing what you think their doing. You think they're just honoring people.](#)”

They are conjuring up spirits.”¹⁰ And a lot of people participating in it have absolutely no idea. What’s the point of all this? To get the people to literally bow down to Black Lives Matter and its revolutionary worldview. That’s Nebuchadnezzar.

One more point about the verse. Jerome noticed, “The princes are assembled to worship the statue in order that through their princes the nations also might be attracted to error. For those who possess riches and power are all the more easily overthrown because of their apprehension of being bereft of them. But after the magistrates are led astray, the subject populace perishes through the evil example of their superiors.”¹¹ There’s nothing new under the sun either his day, our own, or Nebuchadnezzar’s.

A third reason to call the governing officials is a way of vetting traitors in your midst. If someone will not bow, it must be because they are not really loyal to your throne.

¹⁰ All three of these are in the 20 minutes video “The BLM Connection to Witchcraft,” *The Hamilton Corner* (Aug 19, 2020), <https://fromrome.info/2020/08/28/black-lives-matter-founders-involvement-in-witchcraft/>. You can also watch the recent video from Brannon Howse, “Founder of Black Lives Matter Admits Occultism At Center of BLM,” *Youtube* (Sept 2, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVn7US3uOl4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3f5oqU5vkzzFoAEQWx-0B0VNckdj0PPjTDs1KFxsoeLm-sAT0nGH8Eiy4>.

¹¹ Jerome, *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, trans. Gleason L. Archer Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958), 35.

With the well-placed paranoia that ancient kings had of being overthrown or murdered in coups, it makes a lot of sense to do this. It's very practical. Pagan spirituality always is—for those who follow it, *but not for you*. This is the point of vs. 6. “**And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.**”

A word here about **a fiery furnace**. Some people think that there was no such thing that people would be burned in. In actuality, there was.¹² First off, at least 1,000 years before Nebuchadnezzar, The Code of Hammurabi **prescribed death through burning** in fire for three offenses. That is the state carrying out the burning. Don't forget, in the Bible itself, burning with fire is a punishment for certain crimes (**Gen 38:24; Lev 20:14, 21:9; Josh 7:13-19**; etc.). Next, we have Babylonian texts where the **king commanded someone burned** with fire. Finally, we have several instances in Mesopotamia where the criminals were thrown into an oven or a furnace, at least one of which was **for religious reasons**.¹³

¹² See the study, **Paul-Alain Beaulieu**, “The Babylonian Background of the Motif of the Fiery Furnace in Daniel 3,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 289-306.
https://www.academia.edu/1581259/The_Babylonian_Background_of_the_Motif_of_the_Fiery_Furnace_in_Daniel_3.

¹³ A first says, “**Speak to Lu-Ninurta, Balmu-namhe, Ipqu-Erra, and Mannum-kīma-Sîn: Thus says Rīm-Sîn, your lord. Because he cast a boy into the oven, you, throw the slave into the kiln.**”

The effect of this religious mind-control was exactly what the king wanted. “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” (Dan 3:7). Not only the government, but now the people would do his bidding. All we have left is the third reason, to see if there be any traitors in his midst. This is what we turn to in the rest of the chapter.

Living in the Fiery Furnace of Babylon: (vv. 8-12)

Someone has labeled vv. 8-12, “Living in the Fiery Furnace of Babylon” as a way of paralleling being thrown

A palace edict says, “she is veiled for her lord. They shall throw them, either the woman or the man, the eye-witness, in the oven.” The last one says, “(Concerning) all the cult centers of the land of Akkad, all of those from east to west [which] I have given entirely into your control, I have heard (reports) that the temple officials, the collegium, the nešakku-priests, the pašišu-priests, and the dingirgubbû-priests of the cult centers of the land of Akkad, as many as there are, have taken to falsehood, committed an abomination, been stained with blood, spoken untruths. Inwardly they profane and desecrate their gods, they prattle and cavort about. Things that their gods did not command they establish for their gods ... You now, destroy them, burn them, roast them, . . . to the cook’s oven . . . make their smoke billow, bring about their fiery end with the fierce flame of the box-thorn!” See Beaulieu, 282-84. Another says, “Saulmagina my rebellious brother, who made war with me, they threw into a burning fiery furnace, and destroyed his life.” Stephen Caiger, *Bible and Spade* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 176.

into a literal furnace later in the story. I think it is a good summary of these verses. This fiery furnace is the non-believers who hate you and your God. Our story now picks up with certain “Chaldeans” coming forward to “maliciously accuse the Jews” (Dan 3:8). We’ve seen these priest-magicians in the previous two chapters. These are the men Daniel and his friends were slowly moving up the ranks within as they first graduated with the highest honors in chapter 1 and were promoted to higher levels after the dream. Clearly, the wisdom, knowledge, and piety they had in their One God was beginning to grate on these sorcerers.

“They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘O king, live forever! 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. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. 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’” (10-12). You would think these were

the politicians, the government officials with how eager they are to suck up to the king! Far too often that's precisely what religious leaders, even in Christianity, are like—[politicians before shepherds and prophets](#). Move up the ranks. Make the leadership happy.

It is interesting that the three men are finally called by [their new pagan names](#). You would think that because they are not bowing down to the idol that it might retain their Hebrew names, but it doesn't. I think the reason why highlights the political nature of this attack. "[See here, king. These men that were given the names of our gods refuse now to worship yours. You tried to assimilate them. It didn't work.](#)" Make the king think that he is in control. Make him think their deaths are his idea. That's a [spiritual fiery furnace](#) that God's people face by virtue of their remaining in this world where men defy God.

The King's Rage: (vv. 13-15, 19)

It worked. "[Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king](#)" ([Dan 3:13](#)). The [rage of the king](#) is due in no small measure to his

defiance of the living God whom he so brazenly resisted in making this mockery of an image of gold. Whenever someone turns away from the living God after having such magnificent revelation given to them, there is no peace, only anger and rage because they are defying their Creator—and deep down they know this.

This verse begins the **third of five smaller chiasms** in the story but is the only one I will look in detail with this morning, since it takes us to **the center** of the story. You will see that its parallel is in **vs. 19**, “**Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**” (19). What caused his rage to increase?

When the men were brought, the great king **momentarily calmed**. “**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?’**” (14). He asked them directly and bluntly. The parallel to this is their final response in **vs. 18** where it repeats the language, “**serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up,**” and we will get to in a moment.

But first, the king gives them **the option to recant**. Tyrants always give you the **option to turn against God**. This is the one consistent truth of persecution and martyrdom throughout the ages. It is a **tempting trick of the enemy**. Just bow down and worship me, Satan even told the Lord Jesus. The king says here, “**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**” (15a). *Clearly, my lads, you must not have been aware of the edicts. This is now corrected. You may now fall down and worship the image that I have made.* This is the point that Ferguson sees as the crux. **Will the image of God worship the image of man?**

But the king isn't finished. For along with the opportunity to recant there always comes **the threat if you will not**. “**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?**” (15b). Poor Nebuchadnezzar. It is clear that this story takes place after both the first and second chapters, which means that **he knows** that there is a God to gives wisdom, takes care of his people, sends dreams, interprets them, and is in absolute

control of the present and the future. But apparently, the king has yet to learn if this God's control extends to himself.

A True Confession of Faith: (vv. 16-18)

Again, this verse has a parallel in vs. 17, when “deliver us out of your hand, O king” is repeated. This takes us to the center of the story, vs. 16. Now, vv. 16-18 contain what may also be viewed as the center of the story in that they are all one long reply of the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But vs. 16 is the only part that is not repeated. It is fascinating to think about, for it is opposition to political tyranny at its finest. They answered the king and said, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter” (16).

Answer him with regard to what? With regard to who their God is. It seems to me that they know that the King already knows who this God is, for we've seen two chapters now where he has learned the truth. The man knows and he has rejected the truth. Therefore, they will not throw pearls to swine. If in his obstinance and pride he will not call upon the LORD, they will not bother to tell him now. But they

do say something important. They tell him about their God's *power*.

They continue, “If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he may deliver us out of your hand, O king” (Dan 3:17). They do not say how God could save them, because they do not know. They *only confess that their God* has the power to do it. They know this because they know their Scripture and they have read of the many deliverances of God's people from Noah to Lot to Jacob to slavery in Egypt, to the Philistines, and to the horrible kings of Israel. God is able. The only question is “will he?”

I have changed one word from the ESV here. “*He will deliver us*” becomes “*He may deliver us...*” Though most translations use a definite future verb, it is clear that the men do not know if God will save them or not and the rules of grammar permit this change.¹⁴

The reason for this change is so that we do not create a contradiction with the next verse. “*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*” (18). “*But if not?*”

¹⁴ John A. Cook, “Grammar and Theology in Daniel 3:16-18,” *BBR* 28.3 (2018), 380 [367-80], https://www.academia.edu/43608003/Grammar_and_Theology_in_Daniel_3_16_18.

This shows that they do not know if God will save them in a physical, temporal sense. But this is what true faith in God is all about. Their faith in God is not grounded in God's getting them out of trouble. There is no rubbing a magic lamp to get our wishes from a genie as Christians. Theirs **is a true confession**, unlike Nebuchadnezzar's at the end of the last chapter which is not combined with faith.

We believe in Christ simply because of what he did and who he is. That is enough. We believe because he is real, he is raised, and he is God. He has shown himself to us as such in history and in person. When we learn what the Bible really has to say about such things, our view of death becomes one not of fear, but of hope of the life to come. This is something I am daily discouraged by as so many people are absolutely terrified of a virus and maskless people. This should not be for us.

I was reading several **accounts of the martyrs** in preparation for this sermon and one particularly struck me. I'll read to you the account of my favorite church father's death—**Justin Martyr**. But I want to do it in the context of an old Lutheran devotional on the matter.

I also am a Christian! Like a cheering harmony of many voices this ancient watchword of confession is still heard, as it were, from a great distance, and delights our hearts with the clearness and sweetness of its sound. That glorious cloud of witnesses for Jesus, who once made use, with one accord, of this memorable expression, to confess the Lord Jesus before men, has long since entered into the glory of their Lord, clothed with white garments and adorned with the crown of their martyrdom. Centuries of darkness and corruption, of idolatry and superstition, of heresy and schism have since oppressed the Bride on earth and endangered her very existence under the dreadful load, but still, when we transplant ourselves into the primitive times of her purity and glory, amid all the outward most dreadful and prolonged persecutions, how sweet and cheering a word is it that we hear from the lips of countless hosts; I also am a Christian...

Let us consider ... *Justin*, the Martyr. [He] was educated in all the wisdom of the Greeks, but not finding rest for his soul in all their philosophy, he at last found it in the Gospel of Christ. He suffered martyrdom under the emperor Marcus Antonius Philosphus, about the year 163. He, and six of his brethren, were seized and brought before Rusticus the Prefect, who undertook to persuade Justin to obey the gods, and to comply with the emperor's edicts. The martyr

defended his faith and religion ... Rusticus insisted that they should all go together, and sacrifice to the gods. “No man whose understanding is sound, replies Justin, will desert true religion for the sake of error and impiety.” – “Unless you comply, you shall be tormented without mercy.” – “We desire nothing more sincerely than to endure tortures for our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be saved. Hence our happiness is promoted; and we shall have confidence before the awful tribunal of our Lord and Savior, before which, by the divine appointment, the whole world must appear.” – The rest assented, and said: “Dispatch quickly your purpose, WE ARE CHRISTIANS, and cannot sacrifice to idols.” – The governor then pronounced sentence: “As to those who refuse to sacrifice to the gods, and to obey the imperial edicts, let them be first scourged, and then beheaded according to the laws.” The martyrs rejoiced and blessed God, and being led back to prison, were whipped and afterwards beheaded. Their dead bodies were taken by Christian friends and decently interred.”¹⁵

¹⁵ *The Lutheran Watchman*, Volumes 1-2, ed. F. A. Schmidt, Vol. 1, No. 19 (Decorah, Iowa, Sept 15, 1866), 137, 139 [137-43].

https://books.google.com/books?id=zGEVAAAAYAAJ&newbks=0&printsec=frontcover&pg=PA139&dq=The+Prefect+Rusticus+says:+Approach+and+sacrifice,+all+of+you,+to+the+gods&hl=en&source=newbks_fb#v=onepage&q=The%20Prefect%20Rusticus%20says%3A%20Approach%20and%20sacrifice%2C%20all%20of%20you%2C%20to%20the%20gods&f=false

The King's Rage and Carrying out the Threats: (vv. 19-23)

As with Rusticus, so also with Nebuchadnezzar. “Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression on his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated” (19). If six is the number of man, seven is the number of perfection. This will be the *perfect* way to show the world who has the power and who doesn't. All traitors from one end of the empire to the other will hear about what the king did to those who would not worship the gods of Babylon.

“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” (20). The story is moving to a climax and so that we will all see his power, he uses his own “mighty men” to carry out the deed. But who are the Bible's mighty men?

In this story it is none other than “Then these men [who] were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning

fiery furnace” (21). But how could that be? They were just thrown into a kiln that would melt gold.

We learn of this heat in the next verse. “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” (22). They weren’t even in the oven. They were outside of it. It didn’t matter. Like the fire leaping out of the ark of the covenant in Raiders of the Lost Ark, moving from Nazi to Nazi, there is an untamable fire here. But who is the Lord of fire? Do you remember Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron who were incinerated from fire that came out from before the throne of the ark of the covenant in Leviticus 10? That was God’s fire ...

It tells us, “And these three men, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace” (23). Wait. The flames just licked up the mighty men of Nebuchadnezzar who didn’t even go into the fire, and yet these three men just fell bound into it? That’s strange language. We should expect that they, too, were burnt prior to even going into the flames.

Living in a Literal Fiery Furnace: Christ and the Spirit Usurp the King (vv. 24-27)

This was not a fiat of a despot in some far away city who ordered a killing of people he didn't know in a place he had never been. The king was right there, ordering, carrying out, and watching. And behold the sight he saw next. “**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.’ 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’**” (24-25). If it were up to me, this would be been **the center of my story**. Daniel has their confession front and center in order to tell you that faith in God does not rest upon deliverance from death.

But God is so **kind and merciful** and so full of **zeal for his great Name**, that he often does just that so that he might be glorified for his grace. The way he does it here is through one of the **great revelations of himself in the OT**. The king sees four men in the fire when only three were thrown in. He says that this fourth looks like **a son of the gods**. This is the language of the heavenly beings—the sons of God from

Genesis 6:4; Deut 32:8; Job 1:6, 2:1; 38:7; Psalm 82:6, 89:6; etc. You can see this clearly in Old Greek which translates it as **an angel of God**.

These sons of God refer to the **heavenly rulers over the nations**. We will meet three of them later in the book in the prince of Greece, the prince of Persia, and Michael who rules over Israel. They were said to be **seventy** in number, matching the number of nations that come out of Babel. These are the created heavenly beings whom God the Father called his heavenly sons, even as he calls mankind his sons made in his image, and especially Christians who are sons of God.

But **this Son of God is not like the others**. For this Son of God has **the power over fire**. In fact, he is found with different titles throughout the OT and he is often found **surrounded by fire or cloud**. Consider **Exodus 3:2** where the Angel of the LORD calls to Moses from a burning bush. Or think about how Mt. Sinai was covered in flame when Moses went to receive the Law from the Angel of the LORD. Once time the Angel sent fire from himself to consume an offering from Gideon.

What does this fire represent? It is an image of [the Holy Spirit](#) who descended upon the people at Pentecost in tongues of fire. In our story, the Spirit's power over the fire is such that it does not kill the faithful men but licks up those who aren't even thrown in the oven. In our story, God sends his Only Begotten Son to deliver the men from a hellish death, for Christ has the power over the fires of hell itself, how much more an oven in Babylon? Christ as the fourth man has been the interpretation of the church since the beginning. Here's one example from Hippolytus:

Who was this angel who was revealed in the furnace and who preserved the boys as his own children under his enfolding arms ... Let me not deceive, he was not any other person, but the very one who judged the Egyptians with the water ... This was he who received the authority of judgment from the Father. He who also showered fire and divine retribution upon the Sodomites, and destroyed them on account of their lawlessness and wicked impiety. And Ezekiel agrees with this [Ezek 10:2, 6-7] ... Concerning this Isaiah says, "And his name shall be called Angel of Great Counsel" (Isa 9:6 LXX). For Scripture also likens this one to be an angel of God. For it was he himself who reported to us the mysteries of the Father ... [Nebuchadnezzar] called the

names of the three, but he found he was not able to declare the fourth. For Jesus had not yet been born of the virgin.

(Hippolytus, *Commentary on Daniel* 2.32–34)¹⁶

It is such an important thing to see, know, and believe that Jesus Christ is not merely in the pages of the OT in **prophecy** and **typology**, but in **person**. He comes to his people in times of need and he delivers them. This is the same person who came in the NT in the womb of the virgin in order to deliver us ... from our sins and from the fires of hell. It is equally as important to see, know, and believe that his Holy Spirit is equally present in the OT, saving and delivering them. Listen to Isaiah.

In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them. Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people. Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is he who put in the

¹⁶ See **Bogdan G. Bucur**, “Christophanic Exegesis and the Problem of Symbolization: Daniel 3 (the Fiery Furnace) as a Test Case,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10.2 (Fall 2016): 227–244.

midst of them his Holy Spirit, who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. Like livestock that go down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name.

(Isa 63:9-14)

What should be **your response** to these things? For, this story is given to you that you might respond to it. It is not here to merely entertain you so that you can leave this place unchanged. It needs to be like that of the king himself. It tells us, “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” (Dan 3:26). The king confessed the Most High God to all, but then he commanded the men to come out of the fire, alive.

This is not merely the word of king Nebuchadnezzar today. It is the word of **King Jesus** who commands people who are dead to come to life. He tells you this moment to

come out of the fires of hell before it is too late, today, on the day of salvation. He also commands you who have heard his call and responded in faith and repentance to see his continued ongoing love for you. Listen to Spurgeon. “Many a time before His incarnation, He descended to this lower earth in the similitude of a man; on the plains of Mamre, (Gen 18) by the brook of Jabbok (Gen 32:24-30), beneath the walls of Jericho (Josh 5:13), and in the fiery furnace of Babylon (Daniel 3:19, 25) the Son of Man visited His people. Because His soul delighted in them, He could not rest away from them, for His heart longed after them. Never were they absent from His heart, for He had written their names upon His hands, and graven them upon His side.”¹⁷

That’s why this story is given to us. God wants us to know **true confession** of faith. He wants us to know the **power of his Persons** to deliver us. He wants us to be **emboldened** by these things so that when the fiery trials and sufferings come, we will not recant, but will move forward, Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, like Justin and his friends, with our eyes fixed on the heavenly city, with not even the obstacle of capital punishment standing in our way.

¹⁷ Charles Spurgeon, “Morning Dec 17,” in *The Devotional Classics of C. H. Spurgeon: Morning & Evening I & II* (Lafayette, IN: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1990).

This is true life in the midst of the fiery furnace—to know the God who loves you and gave himself up for you. This call is itself deeply political, for you are being told to bow to the king, the High King of Heaven and Earth.

Nebuchadnezzar’s New Decree (vv. 27-30)

The story ends by showing you **the power that God has over the nations**, even those who persecute his people. First, the **government** is made to see the power of God. “**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**” (**Dan 3:27**). Just as they were made the first to bow to the idol, so also they must be the first to see the power of a True God.

Second, the **king worships God**. “**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...’**” (**28**). He has now learned the power of God to save whom he will.

Third, the king makes a new decree. “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” (29). This is very similar to something like our First Amendment which is our most fundamental human right given by God himself—the freedom to worship. The king did not make Judaism (or Christianity) the official religion. He simply allowed them to worship God in peace, without the fear and intimidation of the state coming down on them for doing so. That’s all our own Founding Fathers were doing, recognizing this essential feature of humanity. God made us in his image to worship him. And when the state takes this away, we have now seen the power of God over it.

Finally, the king continued to promote God’s people in the land. “Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon” (30). This sets us up for the next chapter where we think Nebuchadnezzar has finally learned his lesson only to learn that it will still take more to humble this man. May it not be so with you or I today.

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