

For There is No Other God

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Date: 28 March 2021

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[0 : 0 0] King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 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 province to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

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. 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.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. 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.

Verse 8. Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O King, live forever.

[1 : 3 1] 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. Verse 13.

Then Nebuchadnezzar, in furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Verse 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?

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.

[2 : 3 5] 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?

Verse 16. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fire, the golden image that you have set up.

Verse 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, and he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into burning, fiery furnace.

Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their outer garments, and they were thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. 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.

And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace. Verse 24. Verse 26.

[4 : 21] 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. 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. 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.

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. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

[5 : 37] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you again that you have not left us alone to figure out this world, but instead you have spoken to us through your word.

We ask that you would do that this morning, that you would make clear to us your encouragement and also your instruction, that we would know you so that we can stand firm and take action.

We ask these things grateful that we have not earned them or deserved them, but instead we can ask them in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay.

It's test time. Set up. How many times? Amen. Thanks for shouting that out. Yeah, nine times. Nine times in verse 1, 2, twice in verse 3, verse 5, verse 7, verse 12, verse 14, and verse 18.

And the point is clear. Nebuchadnezzar is setting up his own version of reality. This is not a separate story, but it is an episode, but it's connected deeply to what happened in chapter 2.

[6 : 47] Remember in chapter 2, we had this vision of the great image that had the head of fine gold, the shoulders and arms of silver, the middle and thighs in bronze, the legs were iron, the feet were iron and clay.

That, we were told in chapter 2, was a great image. That's chapter 2, verse 31. Nebuchadnezzar decides he's going to set up his own image.

He doesn't like the reality that was given him in chapter 2. He's going to create his own reality. He's going to build for himself what he wants. And so chapter 2, verse 31, there's a vision of a great image.

What does he do in chapter 3? He decides he's going to set up his own great image. This is in verse 1. We're told that this is an incredibly tall image. And many people think this is between maybe 9 or 10 stories high.

And so he's taking this dream. He's making it into reality, but he's changing some details. And there's one detail in particular that's important. Remember, in chapter 2, there was the stone that came at the end, right?

[7 : 52] There was a stone that knocked everything down, became a great mountain, and it filled the whole earth. And as Mark Bates explains so well, that stone is the kingdom of God, right?

Which is growing and expanding. So it topples the nations that come before. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't like that, though. What, in chapter 2, what of God's image was made of fine gold?

It's the head, right? Only the head was made of fine gold. Why? And what did it symbolize? Remember, the head symbolized Nebuchadnezzar.

It was only the head because his kingdom would not be powerful forever. It would be toppled. Only the head in the dream is gold. Now the entire statue is gold.

What is Nebuchadnezzar saying? God can say whatever he wants. Nebuchadnezzar believes he will last forever.

[8 : 58] God has said, chapter 2, you will be temporary. Nebuchadnezzar here in chapter 3 says, no, I won't. I will be permanent. Then, okay, here's another test.

So Nebuchadnezzar, he's setting himself up as permanent. God said he was going to be temporary. How many times do we have the word worship? Eleven times, yes.

He is not just setting up his own reality. Nebuchadnezzar demands worship. And so we see his arrogance in two ways with the statue.

One, he's rejecting God's prophecy for what's going to happen. Okay. Two, he believes that he is worthy of worship. The point is this.

When we live in this world, nations are temporary. But they desire to be permanent. Nations are temporary.

[10 : 02] They desire to be permanent. Nations aspire to eternal greatness. And it never happens. No nation has remained a superpower forever.

I told you I was going to say that once a year. I skipped 2020. So I said it once in 2017, once in 2018, once in 2019. This is the time in 2021. No nation remains a superpower forever.

Anyone who knows history knows that it's one of God's ways of showing that he is the one in charge and in control.

So nations are temporary. They want to be permanent. Nations are supposed to represent God. But instead, they aspire to be God. Nations are meant to represent God.

Instead, they desire to be God. So Romans chapter 13 actually calls the government ministers of God. They're here to represent him on the earth. And yet here in chapter 3, verse 5, we're told that Nebuchadnezzar wants to be God.

[11 : 05] He tells them, verse 5, to fall down and worship. Borrowing language here from Exodus chapter 20. In other words, he's asking them to violate the second commandment, which tells them not to worship any other gods.

And so he's giving us here in a particular situation a general principle that applies to the nations of this world. Nations and rulers demand worship that only belongs to God.

Nations and rulers sometimes receive worship that only belongs to God. We've had politicians, both Republicans and Democrats, in the last few decades who have been treated by some people as gods.

And in many ways, they've aspired to be gods. And so that's a principle of the world that we understand from the Bible. We see it here in Daniel. We see it also in the book of Revelation. That these nations are looking to have this worship and this power and this control and this permanence that belongs to God alone.

So it is for us. We live in a world where nations demand worship. Where they aspire and believe that they're going to be permanent.

[12 : 15] Now, it depends on what part of the world you live in. Some parts of the world, they demand literal worship to a literal god. So we prayed earlier this morning for Nigeria. In that place, there are people who demand that you worship Allah.

In the West, it doesn't quite look like that. Our gods are slightly different. So in the West, we're not asked to worship literal gods. In other words, we're not bowing down before idols.

But there are still things that demand our ultimate loyalty. One of them, one of the big ones, is consumerism, materialism. There's a reason people talk about the almighty dollar. Which is that something that we love in the West.

We're supposed to worship. And so we see people bowing down to this image. Businesses will overlook heinous practices around the world if it means they can make more money. There was just an editorial in the Wall Street Journal two days ago talking about China's strategy to pressure American companies.

To pressure the American government to overlook their human rights abuses. So that they can make money. They're asking them to bow down right before the god of wealth.

[13 : 21] To sacrifice the dignity of human people for the sake of the almighty dollar. That's one of the great gods of Western society. The other great god we're asked to bow down before these days is the god of what might be called sexual autonomy.

Or so-called sexual freedom. Probably more accurately called sexual anarchy. We're not just supposed to tolerate things. We're supposed to celebrate them. And if we don't celebrate them, we're going to be more and more that seems there's going to be punishments.

Restrictions for those who don't love and glorify these things. And I can give you many examples. I'll give you just a few. In Canada, our neighbor to the north. There's more and more happening compelled speech.

There's a father who was recently put in prison because he had the audacity to call his 16-year-old daughter a daughter. Here in the United States, we have pressure that's being put on Christian adoption agencies who are being asked to violate their convictions about what the family is.

And so we see the same pressure that Daniel and his friends experience in Babylon here in our world in slightly different forms. We are asked to worship and bow down before the gods of our nations.

[14 : 32] And we could go on, but the point here is clear. Conflict is what's going to happen. It's inevitable. Of course, there's going to be conflict between Daniel and this kingdom, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and this kingdom when they're asked to worship these gods.

And so we see opposition immediately. Verses 5 through 7, everyone's commanded to worship. Remember the second commandment. This is a violation of that. And then verses 8 through 12, we've got some tattletales.

The Chaldeans come to tattle on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They tell Nebuchadnezzar they're not doing what they're supposed to do. And so they receive a final threat here in verse 15.

Nebuchadnezzar gives them one last chance. 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?

And of course, that's the important question of this entire chapter. Who is the God with real power? Who is the God with real authority and control? Nebuchadnezzar has set himself up with this statue as the one who's actually in charge.

[15 : 39] He's defied God and his prophecies and his decrees. He's forgotten what he said near the end of chapter 2 when he praised God as being the one who is powerful. Daniel and his friends then...

I shouldn't say Daniel. He's not in chapter 3. Daniel's friends have to experience the question and tension of this chapter. Who is the God who will be able to rescue them?

Are they willing to stand firm? And of course, we see here that they are. Verses 17 and 18, they confess their faith. 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. Our God is able and he will. Verse 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.

And so they make this bold move and we find out quickly what happens to them. They're thrown into the fire with all their clothes on so that they'll quickly catch flame. And yet Nebuchadnezzar is surprised, shocked.

[16 : 45] Because as he looks into the furnace, he sees not three men burned up, but four men walking. In other words, God is with these three men and God delivers these three men.

He is with these three men and he delivers these three men. Now I'll just make a quick note here about verse 25. There's this fourth person who's like a son of the gods.

Some people argue that this is an appearance of Jesus. Some people believe it's just an angel. I tend to believe it's probably an angel. It's not a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus.

Either way, the point is the same. God is present with his people. God is present with them in their suffering and their persecution as they live in a foreign land, surrounded by a foreign culture, indoctrinated in the ways that we saw in chapter 1 as they were given new names, as they were educated for three years, as they were instructed in the literature and language of the Babylonians.

As they were given the daily portion of the king's food and wine, God has not abandoned them. He is with them in the fire.

[18 : 04] And so just as we also experience this call, this temptation to worship the nations around us, so also we, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, stand firm.

Remember last two weeks ago, we talked about negotiation as a strategy. Unfortunately, negotiation is not always going to work.

There are times when we choose not negotiation, but defiance. There are times we have to choose not negotiation, but defiance. In that, though, I want you to notice something.

Remember verse 12, the Chaldeans are the ones who come and tattle on them. In other words, they are not making a big show out of this. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not running around, waving their arms, telling everyone how righteous they are.

They're not posting on social media. They're just being righteous. They're trying to fly under the radar. They're just doing the right thing. And I mention that because there's this strain of thinking right now in the American church that somehow we need to be loud and obnoxious all the time.

[19 : 19] And yet, we don't see Daniel or his friends be loud or obnoxious at any point in the book of Daniel. They're actually just quiet and faithful. And sometimes they get in trouble.

Okay, so it's important to note that as we talk about defiance. We, too, like Daniel and his friends, are going to face the consequences of refusing to bow down before the idols of our culture.

There's a pastor many of you know of named Tim Keller who's a big name in our denomination. He was interviewed recently, and he said this. Ten years from now, if you have evangelical convictions about sex and gender, you may not be able to work for a major university or for the government or for a big corporation.

And I mention Keller in part because he's known for being an optimist. So he's not a sky is falling kind of guy. And yet here he is saying in ten years, this might be what we're facing in this country. And so that's the kind of persecution we're probably going to be thinking about and talking about.

Now, I'm guessing most of you aren't going to be threatened to be thrown into a fiery furnace. But there are places and times in the world where if you are a Christian, you're going to face social isolation and ostracization.

[20 : 34] You're going to face the loss of potential job opportunities. You're going to face the loss of educational opportunities. It is not cool to be part of the church anymore.

Maybe in the 1980s or the 70s, it was a positive. It is not a positive anymore. Our culture will not applaud you for being part of the church.

Okay. This was true, by the way, for Christians under communism. Remember when we went through 1 Peter, I told you multiple stories from this book called Candles Behind the Wall. In that book, it talks about multiple instances of Christians who remained faithful, who refused to bow down before communism, this state that demanded worship, and they lost educational opportunities.

They lost job opportunities. Now, I don't say this to be alarmist. I don't say this as a prophet. I don't know what's going to happen in the future. It's important we remain hopeful.

For all we know, we might be on the cusp of a great revival. I have no idea. Okay. So it's important to keep hope and keep perspective. It's also important to be wise as serpents.

[21 : 41] It's important to think about these things. It's important to have a theology of these things. It's important to look at these things, to know what might be coming, and to be people who are wise and prepared. Not only is it popular in the American church for people to want to be loud and obnoxious sometimes, it's also popular for people in the American church to have a martyr complex.

And so I'm hesitant sometimes to talk about persecution because I don't want to feed into it. So we have to have a balance here. What we would probably face is something that people refer to as soft persecution.

In other words, no one's trying to kill you. But you might have less money. And I'll give you an illustration in this way, a way of keeping perspective. As someone who lives in Colorado, when I first moved here, happens less and less, but I would have people tell me, Wow, Matthew, you really have a southern accent.

And you know what I would think? Wow, you really need to get out more. Wow, you have never actually traveled to the southeastern United States, have you?

You probably need to take a trip to Alabama if you think I have a southern accent. And there's also a little bit of truth. My mom has an East Tennessee accent, grew up in North Carolina.

[23 : 00] I went to school in North Carolina. There are times you might hear me say something that's sort of slightly, almost kind of southern. I want you to think about persecution in the United States in that way.

Wow, you think you're really persecuted here in the U.S.? You really need to get out more. You need to visit Nigeria. Then you can see what real persecution looks like.

Also, there's a little bit of truth to it. Yeah, there's some ways in which you might experience soft persecution. Both are true. So I want us to keep this perspective. I'm telling you about potential persecution. The goal is not for us to become alarmist.

The goal is not for us to get worked up and have a martyr complex. The goal is for us to be wise as serpents. The goal is for us to be prepared. The goal is for us not to be surprised.

Okay, Daniel and his friends stood firm. They faced suffering for remaining firm in their faith. We also will face suffering. It will not look as bad, most likely.

[24 : 03] Know what's coming. Think through it. Be prepared. Okay, motivation. Why is it that they are able to stand so firm? Remember, we've talked before about what it means to dare to be a Daniel.

Now, Daniel's not in this chapter. So what does it mean to dare to be a Shadrach, a Meshach, and an Abednego? Well, if we mean by that that we're going to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and we're just going to be these people of bold confidence, that is something we want to stay far away from.

That's moralism. But if by that we mean we want to be like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they trusted in God's power and deliverance, yes and amen.

And we see that here clearly in verse 17. We see why it is that they're willing to stand firm, not because they're people with this inherent willpower, but because they have so much confidence in God.

Verse 17, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us. Their confidence is not in themselves. Their confidence is in God.

[25 : 07] That is what gives them the motivation and the ability. That's what empowers them to stand firm and take courage, not because of their strength, but because of God's strength. To put it another way, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are incapable of delivering themselves from the fiery furnace.

God, however, is powerful and is capable of delivering them from the fiery furnace. And the same is true for us as well.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had confidence in God and his power. We have confidence as well. We actually have even greater confidence for at least two reasons.

One of them, Pastor Mark Bates talked about last week. We have seen that the prophecy of Daniel chapter 2 has and is coming true. We have seen that the stone is becoming a mountain.

We see the kingdom of God spreading and expanding. The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. We can see even many more centuries of God's faithfulness than Daniel and his friends were able to see.

[26 : 16] What they trusted, we now are able to see as we look back over history. We can know even more that Isaiah chapter 40 is true.

The nations are like a drop from the bucket. They are counted as the dust on the scales. Behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. The nations are nothing compared to God.

And so we can have confidence. We can have confidence that God is the one who's in charge, who has control. Some of you who are real old-timers remember all the way back to the summer of 2017.

August of 2017, we were in Matthew chapter 13. This was my month of preaching while our pastor was on sabbatical. I won't tell you the whole story, but remember I told you the story about how I was on a study abroad program and I had to take an archaeology test.

One of the questions on the test was, what would you do if you were a building and you wanted to survive from antiquity to the present? And the answer was, you would have to find a Christian church to adopt you.

[27 : 22] Why? Because that's the institution that lasts beyond nations. That's the institution that continues.

And so there's a building in Trier, I think in Germany, that continued. The Pantheon in Rome. There's a few others. Those are the ones that actually lasted. They found a community to worship. A worshipping community that lasted longer than any nation.

So we have confidence in God for that reason. We've seen his track record even more than these people did. We also see God's power and his presence even more than Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Remember, there's the fourth man who's with them. We have seen God's presence with us, not just in an angel in a furnace, but in Jesus Christ. Remember, Matthew chapter 1, verse 23 tells us his name is Emmanuel, which means God with us.

God is with us even more and in a greater way now because of Jesus Christ. Remember, Jesus tells us the scandalous thing in the Gospel of John, that it's better for him to go away so that the Holy Spirit could be with us.

[28 : 32] And so we've seen God's power. We also have God's presence. And so Jesus teaches us himself. He makes a promise to us that he is going to do what's already been done in this chapter here.

Remember, when they came out, what was amazing besides the fact that they weren't burned? Couldn't smell fire on them.

Their hairs weren't singed. Now, we already stated this together in our Confession of Faith, this morning. We said, He watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head.

It's our Lord Jesus who tells us the same thing, not once, but at least twice. In Luke chapter 12, verse 7, we're told even the hairs of our head are numbered. And in Luke chapter 21, Jesus is telling his disciples about persecution.

And he says this, You will be hated by all for my name's sake, but not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance, you will gain your lives. And so, brothers and sisters, the kingdom of God has come in part, and it will one day come in full.

[29 : 48] And so, we live in the tension now as kingdoms and nations demand our allegiance and our worship. But we stand firm because we know our God.

We know our God even more than Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did in Daniel's day. We know even more what he has done in Jesus Christ. And so, we refuse to worship the gods of the nations.

And instead, we are able to say, with Nebuchadnezzar in verse 29, there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way.

Please pray with me.