

DO OR DIE

DANIEL 3:1-12 OCTOBER 10, 2018

It's the time of year when hurricanes are in the news. In some cases, there seems to be a long buildup before the storm hits. Last month with Florence on the way, 1.7 million people were ordered to evacuate their homes in the Carolinas and Virginia.¹ Then this week it seemed like Hurricane Michael came out of nowhere. Today, USA Today posted a story titled, *Too late to run: Hurricane Michael set to crash into Florida as historic, Category 4 storm.*² Florida Governor Rick Scott said at a press conference: "The time to evacuate coastal areas has come and gone...If you are in an inland county you might have one more chance to evacuate, but only if local officials say it is safe."

The storms of life tend to be just as erratic as hurricanes. Some are a slow build you can see forming on the horizon. Others hit without warning. In those situations, particularly when they involve an attack on our spiritual lives, what can we do to walk victoriously, without compromising our love for the Lord?

Daniel and his 3 friends give us an treasure trove of examples. Chapter 3 has one of the most famous of them: The Fiery Furnace incident.

Our verses this evening are pretty straightforward, even a little bit repetitive. Even still, they are full of a lot of important content. I'd like us to take a look at what we're seeing from 3 angles: First, the **consider** what it would've been like to be one of the Godly Hebrews in this story. Second, to **compare** King Nebuchadnezzar with our own King, Jesus. And third, to address a **controversy** or two that comes out of this text.

Let's take a few minutes and **consider** what it would've been like to live out these verses, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego did.

When we last left off, they had been promoted to oversee all the affairs over the province of Babylon. Daniel was in, perhaps, one of the highest offices in the government, but his 3 friends weren't much further down the ladder. They held key positions of power in the empire.

We're not sure how long it's been between chapter 2 and chapter 3. Based on what we're told in verse 12 of our text, we know that it does have to be *after*. Some scholars feel it would've been a year or two, some feel it could be as many as 20 years. We simply don't know.

It says there in verse 1:

Daniel 3:1 - Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Archaeologists have found a brick foundation upon which this statue may have been set up. The dimensions and proximity to the city line up with the record here. While we're short on some details, here's what we know: This thing was quite large. As tall as an 8 story building. Taller than the Colossus of Rhodes. Taller than anything we've got in Hanford. Quite a display.

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/hurricane-florence-nc-residents-evacuation-god-north-carolina-evacuate-storm-a8536611.html>

² <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/10/10/hurricane-michael-category-4-florida/1586321002/>

Now, if we were reading Daniel's book without taking week-long breaks, this would (of course) feel very connected to the previous story, where Nebuchadnezzar had had his dream of a glorious statue. Daniel had told him, "The image symbolizes the flow of human history, each segment representing a different world empire. Babylon was simply the first portion."

And then what do we see? Nebuchadnezzar sets up an image. But he doesn't recreate what he saw in his dream. No, in a bold affront to God, he makes the *entire* image of gold. Signaling that he rejected God's truth, that his rule and empire would eventually end. His act was a blasphemous challenge to Daniel's God. "Oh You think *You're* in charge? I'll show You who the everlasting king is!"

Now, put yourself in the place of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. You're living life. Doing your job. Honoring your God. And evil comes knocking. It crops up right in your own back yard. Profound evil. Blasphemy. Now, I'm guessing this was no surprise to them. After all, this was a pretty significant building project. The dedication service was huge, with a lot of moving parts. It would've taken quite some time to plan. And our 3 heroes were *over* the affairs of that province. It was more than likely that they *knew* what was coming.

That's how storms can happen for us sometimes. For example, these attacks on our Christianity will sometimes come in the form of a new law or ballot proposition. In those situations, because we live in the greatest country in the world, we often have the opportunity to vote and to voice our opposition. We have the chance to say, "No, we would like that *not* to happen." And we should make it a point to engage Biblically in that process when we can. But that wasn't the case in Babylon. No vote. No protest. This storm had been brewing and finally made landfall one day.

Daniel 3:2-3 - ² And King Nebuchadnezzar sent *word* to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

This was a huge event. It was *everybody*. Military officials, administrative officials, religious officials. Bureaucrats, financial guys, intellectuals, from far and wide were all brought there to be a part. This would've taken a decent amount of time to organize. What is most remarkable to me is that these 3 guys did not find a way to *escape* the dedication, but met it head on. Think about it: They were men of means. Men of power. They could get their hands on a chariot. They could've found a way to hide. But they didn't. Why not? Aren't there times when God's people are allowed to run? Of course. The life of Paul shows us that *sometimes* God has His people run, and *sometimes* He has them brace for impact. Once when Paul's life was threatened, he was lowered down the walls of Jerusalem in a basket so he could escape. Once when he heard of a conspiracy to kill him, he reported it to the Romans and received a huge protection unit to get him where he needed to go. And, other times, he willingly, willfully endured brutal attack for the sake of the Gospel, refusing to escape.

What all these Bible examples reveal is that there *is* no one-size-fits-all answer to a situation like this. Which means, we must be *Spirit led*. Daniel's 3 friends were. As they saw this dedication service taking shape, they realized God wanted them to attend, knowing full well what that might mean. Now, we know why they needed to go. But they didn't know what was going to happen.

In this instance, God had a great plan and wanted them in place that day. What was supposed to be the dedication of a blasphemous idol would instead become a demonstration of *their* dedication to Jehovah and it would become one of the most inspiring and enduring stories of the Old Testament.

Who knows what your day might hold! We have no way of seeing the future the way God can, and so we must be *Spirit led* in our choices and conduct.

Daniel 3:4-7 - ⁴ Then a herald cried aloud: “To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; ⁶ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

⁷ So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, *and* lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down *and* worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

A very clear choice was set before them: Life or death. There our 3 heroes were, in the moment faced with the choice of who they would serve: The Lord, or the world. From the time of the proclamation and the start of the symphony, they would have only moments to decide.

What do you do in a scene like this? Or, as is more common for us, when we have to make a choice whether to compromise or not in some *less* severe way? Very few of us have to actually face a life and death choice in our regular lives. But all of us have to make choices regarding Godliness, integrity, serving God or serving the world. Spiritual faithfulness or compromise.

The Scriptures declare that *if* we’re brought into a situation that’s this severe, the Holy Spirit will fill us with all the power and all the words we need. It’s a great promise from the Lord. But there’s a practical principle we can keep in mind as well.

Notice how it’s worded. The herald said, “To you it is commanded.” That seems final. It seems like there would be no other option. Yet, like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, the Christian is operating under a set of directives that *supersede* any command like this one. Think of all those cars whose license plate says, “CA Exempt.” If your car is on the road, you are *commanded* to register it. Unless you’re operating under a higher office. Then that vehicle is *exempt*.

For a Godly person, a person who belonged to the Lord, this situation in Babylon was serious, but not an unsolvable problem. The decision was already made! Of *course* we can’t obey this decree. Promote it how you want, incentivize or threaten us how you want. The choice is already decided.

Daniel 3:8-12 - ⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. ⁹ They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, *and* psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; ¹¹ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.”

I suppose these Chaldeans had stopped caring about the fact that these 3 Hebrews were instrumental in saving their lives back in chapter 2. Daniel uses particularly strong language in verse 8 when he says they “accused” the Jews. It’s a term that means something like “devour” or “tore limb from limb.” It was vicious and hate-filled. They symbolize for us our accuser, the Devil, who (we’re told) accuses the brethren day and night, seeking to devour and destroy. We need not fear, though, because just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego had the Lord standing with them in their trial, so we have our Advocate, Jesus Christ, who is *so much greater* than the accuser.

The Chaldeans here show their hand. They’re jealous of the position the guys were in. And there in verse 12 they make their accusation. Part of what they say is true, and part is not true. It was *true* that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego did not worship the image or serve the gods of Babylon. Everyone knew, all the time, that these guys and Daniel were, first and foremost, servants of the Most High God. They were open about it. It was obvious. May it be said of *us* that we do not worship the gods of this world, but are servants of the Most High God.

But they also said something that was *not* true. They said, “[they] have not paid due regard to you, [Nebuchadnezzar].” And that simply wasn’t true. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego were 3 of the best employees the empire had. They were men of honor and integrity. They had found *favor* in the palace. They are an effective example of what it means to render to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s. What was *due* Nebuchadnezzar they had given. Worship was *not* due him. As Christians, we need to be careful to make sure that we give to God what belongs to God and to give it to *Him only*. It’s all too easy for us to betray His rule in our lives through compromise or fear or convenience. Be careful that we give the Lord *all* His due and to not give any of it away.

We’ll leave the text suspended for now. Now, let’s take a moment to **compare** two kings. This is a theme that keeps cropping up in the book. We’re all called to choose who we’ll serve. Will we serve the Kingdom of Jesus or the kingdom of the world? Well, take a look at how the world’s king works. You have a man who cares nothing for his closet advisors, his best and brightest servants. He cares only for himself. He’d kill you just as soon as look at you. Notice, he set up the image and the furnace *at the same time*. As the herald made his proclamation, it’s clear the furnace was good to go. Our Lord extends grace and mercy and love, the absolute *opposite* of Nebuchadnezzar’s way of doing things. Perhaps you’re thinking: “Ah, but what about hell? Isn’t that the same thing?” The difference is, Nebuchadnezzar made the furnace to intimidate and strike fear and to take pleasure in destroying those who dared cross him. God says that hell was made for the devil and his angels. He’s not willing that *any* should perish but that all would come to repentance so that He can save them and adopt them as sons and daughters, giving them an everlasting inheritance in the perfection of heaven.

Here we see Nebuchadnezzar would rather surround himself with despicable, backstabbing, murderous yes-men like the Chaldeans, than give these excellent Hebrews the freedom to worship their God. Christ, we’re told, makes us free. He gives us *real* freedom that we might reciprocate the love He has shone to us.

This life on earth, it’s like living in Babylon. We have pressures, storms, choices whether we’ll compromise or not. Consider the kings and choose who you really wish to serve.

Finally, we should address two **controversies** in this text.

Believe it or not, the first has to do with the *orchestra*. If you read commentaries, even from some really solid guys, you may encounter one or two who use this text to try to suggest that utilizing

instruments in a worship service is ungodly. That it is worldly and carnal. That it appeals to the base, pagan heart of man. Babylon did it here to encourage blasphemous worship, therefore using instruments to praise God in heaven is evil.

Well, there's a lot we could say on that issue, but I'll just stick with one point from the text: If we're to extract from these verses that instruments in worship is bad *because* it's what Babylon did, we *must* also come to the conclusion that acting as *heralds*, who proclaim the message of our king, warning of the judgment to come is *also* evil. Right? If the use of an orchestra is carnal, *so is the herald!* What did the herald do? He took his king's message to every people, nation and language, proclaiming the life and death choice: That all men must bow or face the wrath of the king. In a way, isn't that the way we evangelize? Isn't that *preaching*? You cannot build a doctrine of worship from a text like this. So, just a word to you who read commentaries and may come across the argument.

But then the second question: *Where was Daniel?* He is nowhere to be found in the entire story.

There are 3 options: Option 1: Daniel bowed to the image. That is simply unbelievable. This was a man who was ready to die for his God not just once in a fit of religiosity, but as a pattern of life.

Option 2: He *didn't* bow, but the Chaldeans were too afraid of him to lump him in with Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. This too seems too fantastic to believe, since Daniel is not found interceding for his brothers in any way. He put his life on the line to save the pagan wise men, but he stood idly by while his closest friends were thrown in the fire?

Option 3: Daniel, as Secretary of State, was away on some business that kept him from being in attendance at this dedication ceremony. This not only makes the most sense, but actually gives us a wonderful type, a picture, of the end times. Remember: This is a prophetic book. We learn a *lot* about God's plan for Israel in the end times. In these passages, Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked world leader, is a type of the AntiChrist. The image he set up is a type of the Abomination of Desolation, which Daniel will talk to us about in chapter 12. The 3 Jewish believers become a type of the nation of Israel, enduring the fiery trials of the Great Tribulation. Daniel, being mysteriously absent, then becomes a type for us of the *Church*. Gone from the scene. The Church will be raptured before the events of the Great Tribulation, just as Daniel is not found suffering with the others, but is altogether absent from the story. It's a great, hidden picture in this famous story.

And so, as we await that moment when we are caught up to be with the Lord, we remember that we walk in *power*. We have no need to fear, whether a storm comes out of nowhere or builds on the horizon. We know who we believe, we serve our King and He loves us, He is with us and He will see us through whatever we face in life.