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**C1229 – August 29, 2012 – Daniel 3:1-30**  
**The Fiery Furnace**

If you'll turn once more with me to the Book of Daniel. Last week in Dan 2 God exalted Daniel by revealing to him Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the interpretation of the dream. This is one of the largest scale prophecies in the Bible. If you have the image I passed out last week it outlines what Jesus called "the times of the Gentiles" which is the time Israel is under divine discipline by Gentile nations. The four Gentile kingdoms to discipline Israel are, first of all, Dan 2:37-38, Nebuchadnezzar, the head of gold. He's the only king identified as a part of the statue and he is said to be a king of kings, so he is a great, great Gentile king. After him, verse 39 will arise another kingdom inferior which is Medo-Persia, the breast and arms of silver. Then a third kingdom which will rule over all the earth is Greece, signified by the waist and thighs of bronze. Finally a fourth kingdom, verses 40-43, which is a divided kingdom, the first division we know as Historic Rome and it is signified by the legs of iron, so it is very strong, but then a second division we're referring to as Future Rome and it occurs after a gap of time, some period of time during which it is sort of under the radar, developing but in a furtive way and will one day rear its ugly head. This Future Rome is signified by the feet and toes, partly of iron and partly of clay so it is partly strong and partly weak. It will have elements of both and these will try to combine with one another in the seed of men, meaning the strong and weak elements will try to unite and form a global kingdom but they will not adhere to one another so it will not succeed. Now these strong and weak elements are strong and weak kings, there are ten kings ruling future Rome simultaneously and I'm gathering that from the ten toes and I'm looking at Dan 2:44 where he says, "in the days of those kings," so there are a plurality of kings ruling together, but I'm also looking ahead to Dan 7 and in that vision there are ten horns parallel to the ten toes that are clearly kings. So I take it that the ten toes are ten kings that rule Future Rome simultaneously,

so it's obviously got ten divisions, and some of these kings are stronger and some are weaker but they are going to try to unite and form a united kingdom but that attempt will fail.

Now these ten kings are often referred to as a ten nation confederation and someone asked me last week what I thought this would look like. At times it has been thought by prophecy scholars to be the United Nations and in more recent times the European Union or that it will develop out of one of these organizations because they are looking at Europe, which is basically the boundary of Ancient Rome. And so they are thinking that the ten divisions or kings come from within the boundaries of ancient Rome. But my take is that Future Rome is a global kingdom. By this time the influence of Historic Rome has infiltrated the entire earth so that the entire earth's surface is divided into ten divisions or kingdoms. And if you look at earth's surface we have seven continents so those are natural divisions. But continents like Asia and Africa are quite large so you can see them feasibly being cut in two. The bottom line is that within the continental divisions there will be some divisions that will result in ten divisions and over these ten divisions will be ten kings, some will be strong, others will be weak, they will all try to unite into a global kingdom but this will fail.

And in verse 44 it fails because a fifth kingdom, an eternal kingdom, signified by the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, showing it is a supernatural kingdom, will crush and put an end to all these Gentile kingdoms, but it will endure forever. So this is the Messiah's kingdom.

And this was Daniel's focus; he was looking at the latter days, the end of Gentile supremacy and the re-establishment of Israel. So the dream gives hope to Israel in Exile, it shows that their discipline is temporary and not eternal, it shows that God is sovereign over the nations and will one day crush them and restore Israel to her Abrahamic promises. As for Gentiles, the dream serves the purpose of warning against arrogance. Gentile kings and rulers should not get arrogant because God gave them their kingdoms and power and authority and just as easily God can take it away. So the dream serves the two purposes of giving hope to Israel and warning Gentiles against arrogance.

Now a clear implication of the dream is premillennialism and I won't camp on it too long, but the sequential nature of the five kingdoms depicted by the dream indicates that all five kingdoms are earthly kingdoms. Clearly Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome are all earthly kingdoms, no one would argue against that, so then it follows that the Messianic kingdom which follows is also an earthly kingdom. Clearly it strikes and destroys the others and replaces them. So Dan 2 is very important to the premillennial framework and it gives amillennial commentators problems in particular since they hold that the kingdom is heavenly. And while it is in origin, the kingdom comes from heaven, it is not in manifestation, it is an earthly manifestation of the kingdom of heaven. So then we have premillennialism supported strongly by the dream of Dan 2.

Tonight we come to Daniel 3, the fiery furnace and you know this story from childhood so I hope to tell it to you afresh tonight. Let's make some introductory remarks. First of all we've made mention of the fact that Daniel 2-7 are the Aramaic portion of the book. That language was the lingua franca of the day, so it could be widely read by any Gentiles involved in politics, in commerce, in trade because it was necessary to the communication between foreign nations. So these chapters are addressing the nations in particular but Jews as well since they live within these nations. And we observe a literary structure within these chapters. I mentioned last week that chapter 2, the four kingdoms crushed by the stone cut out without hands would be paralleled in chapter 7 by the four beasts destroyed by the Son of Man. So chapter 7 answers to chapter 2, they're talking about the same material. And tonight in chapter 3, the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace will be paralleled in a few weeks by chapter 6, Daniel in the lion's den. Both cover the exact same themes. And finally, to round out the structure, chapter 4 will be paralleled by chapter 5. So we find a common literary structure known as a chiasm where the first and sixth element are parallel, the second and fifth element are parallel and the third and fourth elements are parallel. So observe this literary structure, apparently Daniel organized the events after this pattern and so we'll be repeating these themes in the coming weeks.

Secondly, as chapter 3 begins it is apparent that Daniel had already been promoted into the two positions described in Dan 2:48, "ruler over the whole province of Babylon" - he was in the king's own court and "chief prefect over

all the wise men of Babylon,” those men who were scheduled to be torn limb from limb but God saved them and they probably pledged their lives to Daniel in return. As far as Daniel’s three friends are concerned, they didn’t get left behind. Verse 49 reports, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego” were also promoted at Daniel’s request and so they now serve in governmental positions as administrators of the province of Babylon. And it seems clear that chapter 3 is happening after chapter 2 from several lines of evidence. In 3:12 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had already been appointed to their administrative positions. Further, the image in 3:1 that Nebuchadnezzar sets up seems to relate to the statue in chapter 2.

Now one of the problems with Dan 3 is we don’t know where Daniel is, he’s not mentioned in the chapter, and this has been a subject of intense debate. Probably the chief solution has been to claim that he was out of the country handling some personal affairs of the king but there are other possible solutions we’ll entertain, especially in light of the conclusion of chapter 2 where undoubtedly the wise men of Babylon were in deep gratitude to Daniel. But whether Daniel was there or not, there is no doubt that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are going to have to face the fire on their own. Up to this point Daniel had been their leader. He had led them to commit civil disobedience in Dan 1 by refusing to be defiled by the king’s choice food and wine. But now with this second challenge to their worship they don’t have Daniel to lead the way. So we learn some about the character of these three men.

Now having stated plainly that Daniel 3 occurs after Daniel 2 there’s a debate about how long after. When did this occur? And the most common view is that it occurred around the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC which would have been Nebuchadnezzar’s 19<sup>th</sup> year. However, another view that has recently come to light is that it occurred between 594-593BC, about 6 years before the final siege on Jerusalem began. And the reason is because a clay prism was discovered from the time of Nebuchadnezzar that records a ceremony of some sort headed by Nebuchadnezzar that sounds similar to the one recorded in Dan 3. On the prism three names are reported that by linguistics have been shown to possibly be the names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Further evidence is put forth that what stimulated this ceremony was a rebellion within the kingdom of Babylon in 594 in which Nebuchadnezzar had to kill some of his own soldiers. In light of the rebellion

Nebuchadnezzar summoned all the rulers of his kingdom, several of which are listed in verse 3 as well as on the clay prism, in order to affirm the loyalty of his administrators and solidify his kingdom and sovereignty. So if the clay prism and Dan 3 are reporting the same ceremony of dedication then 594-593BC seems like the best time for this event. This would also be within a close time frame to the dream of Dan 2 which was 603BC, so Daniel and his friends would have been ~26-27 years of age, they would have been working in the government for nine or ten years.

Let's look at verse 1, **Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.** Now this is a rather large image but strange proportions. We're not told what the image is, though if we connect it with the statue of Dan 2 then it's an image of a human which is what I suspect. It's a human after the Babylonian form of art which didn't follow natural proportions. Notice its **sixty cubits** in height and **six cubits** in width, since a cubit is approximately one and a half feet we're talking about an image ninety feet tall and nine feet wide, the ratio being 10:1 which is extremely disproportional because a typical human is 4 or 5:1. When I took my measurements I was 18 inches wide and 66 inches tall which is about 4:1. So if I were 10:1 I'd be just as wide as I am now but I'd be 15 feet tall. So this is an extremely tall and narrow figure. It's towering above the plain mentioned there, **the plain of Dura.** **Dura** was a common name referring to a "walled" or "enclosed" area so it's a **plain** that is walled in or enclosed, probably by surrounding hills or mountains and it says the plain was **in the province of Babylon.** So it can't have been too far from the city of Babylon. Where is this place? Julius Oppert in the 1850's did his archaeological excavations in Babylon and found a square base or pedestal, 45 feet per side and 20 feet high about six miles SE of the ancient city of Babylon that he identified as the pedestal this image stood upon. So the most likely location of the image Nebuchadnezzar had constructed of gold was in a **plain** enclosed by hills or mountains about six miles from the city. Now it wouldn't be pure gold, that would be far too heavy and expensive, but it would have been wood overlaid with gold which was a common construction technique, the ark of the covenant itself was acacia wood overlaid with golden plates. But nevertheless, it would appear quite impressive, when the sun shone on it it would have reflected an immense brightness and it would have towered far above everything for miles.

Now the question is, where did the idea for this image come from? All images humans construct come from images that are first in the human mind. And I'm suggesting that the thought behind the image was the dream Nebuchadnezzar had in Dan 2. Not many commentators take this route, but it seems blatantly apparent. And upon deeper reflection on the text it's the only thing that makes sense. The image was inspired by the earlier dream. Now you will notice there are differences in the image he's constructed over against the statue in the dream. There are manipulations. And this is what I call strategic envelopment. Unbelief has a strategy, an agenda, it's not neutral and it doesn't just sit there and absorb data and interpret it independent of its ultimate beliefs. It rather strategically envelops the data and interprets it according to its ultimate beliefs. And that's what Nebuchadnezzar has done. No sooner had the dream and the interpretation come than Nebuchadnezzar had re-interpreted the dream and interpretation according to his ultimate belief system. Such that he who was once merely the head of gold on the statue is now the entire statue and there is no stone at all that destroys the statue.

So we can deduce principles of how paganism works, how the flesh operates, what it does to truth and we can't get too arrogant here just because we're believers; we share the flesh too so we are fully capable of doing these types of manipulations. So as far as the flesh is concerned, the first thing we have to know about our flesh is that it is at enmity with God, it is not friendly to the things of God, it's hostile to God and therefore we can't expect any kind of good to come out of the flesh. Secondly, Paul says in Romans 1 that our flesh suppresses the truth in unrighteousness, that is, it's not that the flesh doesn't know the truth, it's not that the flesh isn't confronted with the truth, it's rather what the flesh does with the truth is suppress it, and the result is a distorted image of the truth. There may be similarities to the truth but in the overall we have a different image, an image that has taken the truth and manipulated it. That way I feel safe from the God with whom I have to do, that way I have shielded myself from Him so I don't have to think about him.

So when we look at these principles of the flesh and we apply them to Nebuchadnezzar we know Nebuchadnezzar is operating by the flesh, that he is at enmity with God, he's hostile to God, he has been confronted with the truth about the future of world kingdoms, he has had it all laid out before

him very plainly in the dream of Dan 2. What he saw was he was the head of gold, after him an inferior kingdom of silver would rise, then another kingdom of bronze would take over all the earth, then a kingdom of iron and iron mixed with clay would arise and then it would be destroyed and replaced by kingdom of stone that would never be destroyed. That's the truth of world history that Nebuchadnezzar saw. But what has Nebuchadnezzar done? The image he has constructed is purely of gold, there's no silver, bronze or iron, and there's no stone. He's suppressed this progression of kingdoms and out comes a distorted image of the truth. That's what we're seeing in Dan 3, a pagan distortion of the truth of Dan 2.

Now there's an element of truth in his distorted image, there are always elements of the truth that the flesh can accept, as long as it's something that appeals to the flesh, and in this case Nebuchadnezzar's flesh has taken the head of gold and he's made the entire image gold. And since the head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar himself, then this image is Nebuchadnezzar. He's not just the head of gold anymore, he's the entire statue. And what is Nebuchadnezzar saying? He's saying my kingdom is the final kingdom, my kingdom is eternal, I am sovereign, I am great, I am colossal, I am mighty and no one will ever destroy my kingdom. Do you see the arrogance of what he's done here? He's taken God's plan for history revealed in the dream of Dan 2 and he's re-interpreted it within his ultimate beliefs and what came out is a distorted version of God's plan for future history. And what it really is is a re-write of future history. Nebuchadnezzar is so great and so mighty that he has the power to direct and manipulate the rest of history such that his kingdom will never be destroyed. That's one of the major purposes of this chapter, to reveal the arrogance and audacity of Gentile rulers. They think their decisions are so mighty that they can direct and control the future; that they decide whatsoever comes to pass. This has always been the ultimate belief of Gentile rulers; that history is open and that men are able to control and manipulate history, that God, an outside God who is acting upon the creation to take history where it is going does not exist. But chance does exist and we are writing history as we go along, there's no plan outside of our plans for history, we are writing the plan.

What Nebuchadnezzar has done is what every Gentile ruler is prone to do and that is get arrogant. When they get power they get arrogant. So don't be surprised the next time some conservative judge or politician gets appointed

to a high office and they turn out to be moderate or liberal. The principle of this happening has already been laid out 2,600 years ago through Daniel. Gentiles are inclined to arrogance because they are governed by the flesh. And when a person who wants power gets it it suddenly goes to his head. That's why the founders of this country set up the division of powers; they knew what I'm telling you right now. They knew that there were certain people that wanted power and they knew that the people that ran for public office were people who wanted power, so to keep this power from running rampant they set up three branches so each branch would exercise its power to keep the others in check. So that was a brilliant design in our constitution. But don't be surprised about how conservative Gentile politicians and judges can seem to suddenly turn around one day and go off the deep end. This was all laid out almost three millennia ago.

And here we have a Gentile ruler who has become very arrogant in a very short period of time, he has distorted and twisted the truth and now he is rapidly carrying out his principles, to re-write the future and establish his kingdom as forever, and the first step in establishing future history is to construct an awesome image of himself, one that towers above everyone in the plain. Can you imagine it? A remarkable sight. Verse 2, and here we come to step two, establish loyalty in your administration, you've got to have loyalty, you can't have dissenters. **Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.** <sup>3</sup>**Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.** You can see clearly loyalty is the issue, everybody in the key leadership positions in the entire country has got to profess loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom, he can't have any dissenters because dissent is what causes weakness and his kingdom has got to be strong, intact. So the purpose here is to solidify the kingdom, ensure the loyalty of his administration, and to secure his kingdom forever. Any dissenters have to be immediately rooted out. This man, once he gets it in his mind what he wants to do, is a no-mess around guy. He has thought it all through, every detail.

Verse 4, they've all assembled in the plain, they're wearing their official uniforms, hundreds and hundreds of men assembled in a formation before the great image, it's a great dedication ceremony. **Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language,** notice Nebuchadnezzar had a diverse administration, he had conquered many kingdoms and taken members of the royal and upper class to train and install in his administration, that way he could rule more effectively over all the kingdoms he had conquered, he particularly needs to make sure he has their loyalty. So the herald proclaims in verse 5, **that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music,** this was some kind of orchestra Nebuchadnezzar had put together, it was a royal ceremony, and when they began to play, then **you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.** **"But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."** Now apparently this furnace of blazing fire was within sight because there's immediacy to the threat - if you don't fall down and worship you will immediately be cast into this furnace. The furnace was a lime kiln, it would have been very large, the large opening was at the top and you'd have to go up a series of steps to get to the top and drop the limestone in, down the shaft would be a location to feed wood into the kiln, control the draft and remove the ash, at the very bottom there was a receptacle for catching the lime.

This is the threat and Nebuchadnezzar gave everyone two choices here, isn't he a nice guy? You can **fall down and worship** or **be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.** Great options. Life or die basically but I'm going to have loyalty in my kingdom. So with this furnace blazing Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have a little problem. Verse 5 is what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego could not do. They could not worship any graven image. It would be break the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me...You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God..." So they shouldn't succumb to this, there's tremendous pressure, every ruler in the kingdom of any account is present, it's an official royal ceremony, the orchestra is present, the king is presiding, what are they going to do?

Verse 7, **Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language fell down *and* worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.** And most people would have done the same, it's an easy out, just bow down and worship, who wants to be thrown in the furnace. So they pledged loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar and the gods of Nebuchadnezzar. That was the significance.

But verse 8, it comes to Nebuchadnezzar's attention that not everyone bowed down, there was dissent. **For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews.** It's always those Jews, they're such a problem, sticklers. Why these Jews are at it again. The **Chaldeans** bring the charges, they were the native people, Nebuchadnezzar's own countrymen.

Verse 9, **They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever!** Typical flattering greeting. <sup>10</sup>**"You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. <sup>11</sup>"But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. <sup>12</sup>"There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, *namely* Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."** You can see they had a problem with the Jews because it's always the Jews. So now the king realizes he has a hiccup in step two of his plan. Step one was complete, build an awesome image of himself outlining future history. Step two was to solidify the kingdom by ensuring loyalty among his administration to secure this future history, always trying to control, to manipulate, that's the way Gentile rulers work. But now he's got a problem, three Jews named **Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego** are not going along with his program. He knows these men, they serve in the province of Babylon, have been for years, but this is a challenge to his authority and it's a public challenge, every ruler from the entire kingdom is watching, so watch. Verse 13, **Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; he gets mad,**

they're upsetting things and I don't think he expected this, he probably thought the threat was enough to ensure loyalty. **Then these men were brought before the king.** <sup>14</sup>**Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? You know, is that right? Are these charges accurate? I'm going to give you a chance to disprove these charges.**

Verse 15, **"Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"** Now it's that last line where he clearly steps over the line, he's already been confronted with the God of heaven who revealed the dream through Daniel so he knows what God can deliver. But he's suppressed the knowledge of this God in unrighteousness and in place of that God he has made himself magnificent. So **what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands**, what god is there that is greater than I am, I am great, I am colossal, I am sovereign. So here we see again the danger of arrogance among Gentile rulers and it's a characteristic of rulers in these times, you can bet your last dollar they'll turn out arrogant, almost always. It's characteristic of the age.

So surely this can't be true, I'll give you another chance to show loyalty and he turns to the orchestra to fire them up again but verse 16, **Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter."** In other words, there's no need to fire up the orchestra, we're not going to fall down and worship the image you set up. They're not being rude, some have said they were rude here, they're not rude, they're just politely saying there's no need to fire up the band again because we've already given our answer, we're committed to our decision. So they're resigned to the furnace and verse 17 they say, **"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.** <sup>18</sup>**"But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."** Now this is one of the most courageous answers any

believer has ever given. And it's given publically. Everyone sees this, whether they heard it audibly or not, you can be sure word got around. And this is humiliating to Nebuchadnezzar because they clearly pledge loyalty to their God and not Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar does not declare the future, Nebuchadnezzar is not sovereign on his own steam. God has given him his kingdom and power and authority. And that is the message they are sending loud and clear.

So here we see into the character of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. They have watched Daniel, they have grown spiritually, now they are in the hot seat and they pass the test with tremendous colors. They feared God rather than man, a great illustration of the principle of the NT, do not fear men who can destroy the body but rather fear God who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. And they are acting on that principle. And the way they state it is very interesting, they don't act like they have insight into God's will for their lives, they don't know what's going to happen, all they know is that God is able to deliver them from the blazing fire if He wants to. And that's enough for them. They don't have to have assurance that they will be saved. God is still on the throne whether He saves them or not. So this is a clear case of outright civil disobedience.

So let's put down some principles of civil disobedience. Now this occurs under the fourth divine institution in Scripture, human government or civil authority or kingdom authority. Any of those titles is sufficient. The important thing is not the title but the fact that human government was given by God after the Fall and after the Flood in Gen 9:1ff, so sin was in the world and this alerts us to the purpose of human government which is to curb the effects of sin. And Rom 13 says there is no authority but that which is designated by God. So human government is a divinely authorized function. On the other hand we find instances like this where people commit civil disobedience against the governing authorities. So the problem arises, are their proper times to disobey civil authorities? Or are we always to submit to the states wishes?

Now I would suggest that there are two issues where you are justified in committing civil disobedience and both of these are illustrated in Scripture. The first issue has to do with the sacredness of innocent human life. When the state comes along and says we are going to commit genocide, euthanasia

and abortion, the innocent taking of human life, we have a responsibility to commit civil disobedience. This is modeled in Exod 1 by Shiphrah and Puah, the two Hebrew midwives when the Pharaoh commanded them to kill all the little baby boys as they were being born. It was real easy to do, the mother couldn't see so all the midwife had to do was strangle the little boy's neck. But the midwives feared God and not the Pharaoh and so they committed civil disobedience. So issue one is if the government comes in and authorizes the destruction of innocent human life then you have a legitimate reason to say, "No, I'm sorry but I cannot do that."

The second issue has to do with worship. When the government comes along and says here is how you must worship, who you must worship or when you must worship, when the government tries to control worship then we have a responsibility to commit civil disobedience. This is modeled in Daniel several times. Tonight we're in Dan 3 with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when they refused to fall down and worship this image. So issue two is if the government starts to dictate in the arena of worship and says you must bow down and worship this or at this time or in this way, then you have the right to say, "No, I am sorry, but I can't do that."

So the two issues are the sacredness of human life and worship. And if you commit civil disobedience over one of these two issues understand there are tactics to how you carry out the rebellion, how you treat the government. And the first thing to remember is always show respect to authority. Daniel does this, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego do this, they do not defy the office; they are simply saying "You've asked me to do something I cannot in good conscience do before my God and I'm not going to do it." So there is respect for the office of the fourth divine institution. The second thing is to be praying, praying for the leadership so that we might have peace. There's no reason to start a war with the government, that's not going to go very well with you.

And finally, be prepared to take the consequences of your choice. Daniel and his friends were clearly prepared to have to chomp down on the king's choice food; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were prepared to be thrown in the furnace. So be ready to accept the consequences and let's see what happened with these three men.

They've told the king we're not going to comply with the state's wishes, Verse 19, **Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.** Now he was already mad in verse 13 but he's totally angry now and when you lose your temper you lose your rationality. And you can see that's occurred here because if he really wanted to make them suffer he'd have turned the heat down seven times, that way they'd burn for a long time. But he's completely lost it, his facial expression is altered toward them, he's going to make an example of them now, so he gives the order, they start throwing more fuel on the fire, they increase the draft, the fire is really going now.

Verse 20, **He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire. 21Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their other clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. 22For this reason, because the king's command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.** So it's just very hot and his own men are dying just throwing these guys in, **But**, verse 23, **these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up. 24Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste;** apparently there was a God who was able to deliver them out of his hand and now he's face to face with this God again. **he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." 25He says, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!"** Now we don't know exactly who Nebuchadnezzar thought this was, later in verse 28 he says it was an **angel** of the God of the three men. And he may be right but I suspect it was the pre-Incarnate Christ in a Theophany. So he's standing there jaw dropped. Verse 26, **Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the**

midst of the fire. <sup>27</sup>The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around *and* saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them. Now, I can't say it any better than that. They analyzed them and there was not one shred of empirical evidence they were even in the fire! <sup>28</sup>Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup>"Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." <sup>30</sup>Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

We've run out of time so what are we supposed to learn from this? Why is this chapter in the Bible besides the fact that it preaches well? First, I think you have to understand paganism and the flesh, it's not that paganism doesn't know; it's not that they need more information; it's that they are at enmity with God and suppress the truth in unrighteousness, distorting it, that's what paganism does. There is an agenda to unbelief and don't ever forget it. These people are not neutral. Second, as far as Gentile rulers are concerned it was written to warn them against becoming arrogant. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't write history, God writes history and yet Gentile rulers keep thinking they can manipulate, they can control history, they do nothing of the sort. Yet this never seems to be recognized by Gentile rulers. Just look at the world rulers today and ask yourself if there's one who admits God gave me my position and God can just as easily take it away. I can't think of one among the whole lot. So don't get your hopes up too high in the next election, have realistic expectations based on the principles of Daniel. Third, as far as these three Jews are concerned, their example is now available to all Jews who live out under those nasty Gentile powers of how to live, how to trust the Lord and obey in a crisis situation, which the Jews have had plenty. Fourth, we have an example of civil disobedience, what the two major issues are that merit civil disobedience; issues concerning the value of human life and

worship, and we've gained some basic principles for how to commit it, respectfully and being prepared to accept the consequences. Sixth, and I'm stretching on this one, but hopefully not too far, it's possible that the entire times of the Gentiles could be looked at as a metaphorical fire the nation Israel is now in and the fact that God is going to ultimately refine the nation and deliver a remnant, bringing them safely into the kingdom. So if that's the case then Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego can encourage the nation Israel, giving them a reminder that God is faithful to His promises and He is able to deliver.

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