

You may have heard that the Pope wants to change the Lord’s Prayer.

Normally I don’t comment much on such things,  
but since our passage deals with the issue so clearly,  
I thought that I should at least mention it.

What you see in Daniel 3 is the Lord *leading* Daniel’s three friends into temptation  
*and* also then *delivering them* from evil.

There is nothing wrong with saying that God *leads us* into temptation.

After all, in Matthew 3, the Holy Spirit *led* Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted!  
And the Holy Spirit is God.

So if God the Holy Spirit led God the Son into the wilderness to be tempted,  
then we should not be surprised when God leads *us* into temptation.

Indeed, that is the whole point of the petition:

“Lead us not into temptation, *but* deliver us from evil.”

In other words, we would prefer not to be tempted,  
but if you do lead us into temptation, then please deliver us.

Ad that is *exactly* the point here in Daniel 3.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are confident that God is leading them.  
They have been praying “Lead us not into temptation” –  
but then temptation comes.

And that does not cause them to doubt God!

Indeed, they trust God to deliver them –  
but even if he doesn’t,  
they will still obey the LORD their God, even unto death.

Why does God lead us into temptation?

Why does he lead us into testing?

The apostle Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:6-7

“In this [salvation] you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary,  
you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith –  
more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire –  
may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

God leads us into the temptation in order to test the genuineness of our faith.

Will we trust him?

When we face the fiery trial, will we stand firm?

### **1. King’s Decree: Dedication of the Image (v1-7)**

*King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits<sup>[a]</sup> and its breadth*

*six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” <sup>7</sup> 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.*

Given the placement of Daniel chapter 3 – namely, right after chapter 2 – we are supposed to see a connection:

Nebuchadnezzar has had a dream about an image –  
and Daniel had told him that *he* was the golden head of the image!  
So now Nebuchadnezzar makes a golden image for the people to worship.  
In the first 18 verses we hear about this image 11 times over.  
In the first 7 verses, we hear six times that Nebuchadnezzar *has set up* this image.

Ninety feet high and nine feet wide – this is a massive image.  
So you can see how this image is connected to his dream –  
but this image is *not* designed to bring honor to Daniel’s God.  
After all, if he wanted to memorialize the God of Daniel,  
there would have been a little stone next to the image –  
as if to warn all future kings that their kingdoms cannot endure!

And when you hear the decree of Nebuchadnezzar,  
you are to hear an echo of the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 43 had said, “Let all the nations gather together....  
Let them bring their witnesses....  
I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.” (43:9-11)

But Isaiah 43 had also said,  
“When you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.” (43:2)

But for the rest of the nations, they knew of no such promises.  
All they knew was that the Great King commanded their worship!

And so verse 7 tells us that when the music played,

*everyone* bowed down and worshiped.

Well, apparently *not quite* everyone!

## 2. The Accusation of Rebellion (v8-12)

<sup>8</sup> Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.

<sup>9</sup> They declared<sup>[b]</sup> to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup> 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.”

Because in verse 8, certain Chaldeans came and *maliciously* accused *certain* Jews.

Yes, their accusation is *true* – but their motives are plainly set on evil.

For instance, they accuse Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

What about Daniel?

Did Daniel bow?

Of course not.

But Daniel has “made it” into the rank of the senior advisers –  
the trusted counselors of the King.

To accuse Daniel could backfire!

Nebuchadnezzar has taken a liking to Daniel.

Think about how it plays out in the work world today:

if the boss plays favorites –

then if you accuse one of his favorites of some misdeed,  
he might punish you for being a tattler.

But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Sure, they are friends of Daniel –

but these Chaldeans are confident that Daniel cannot protect them.

(And, by the way, they seem to be right:

Daniel makes no appearance in the chapter.)

So the three friends face a lot of serious pressure to conform:

First, it is the King who demands it –

Nebuchadnezzar is called “King Nebuchadnezzar” six times in the first 7 verses.

But then notice how *everyone* is doing it –

satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates,  
and all the officials of the provinces...

(and in case you didn’t get the whole list in verse 2,  
the whole list is repeated in verse 3!).

And furthermore, *everyone* is doing it *at the same time* –  
when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe,  
and every kind of music...  
(and you hear repeated that in verse 5, 7, 10 and 15).

But as you hear this story,  
do any of *you* feel the slightest temptation to yield to this pressure?  
No?  
Why not?

Well, the story is told with a good measure of the *absurd* thrown in.  
Think about it.

Verse 1 – King Nebuchadnezzar *made* an image of gold.  
Verse 15 – the King demands that they worship the image “that I have made”  
And for that matter, the other main verb for this image is “set up” –  
a man has made an image and set it up –  
it’s a “set up job” (as one writer puts it, Davis, 53)  
“The writer is telling you that it’s no more divine than your knee replacement” (Davis 53)

There is a healthy dose of sarcasm and mockery in the way that the story is written.  
“The repeated lists of officials (mimicking the bombast of government missives)  
and the lists of instruments (mimicking the lavishness of court liturgical language)  
bring across the point that self-worship in the end is silly in its self-importance,  
banal in its evil.” (Sumner, 138)

But it is only absurd to those who have eyes to see.  
For most people, “hey, he’s the king! If he wants us to bow, we’ll bow!”  
Be careful!  
Because that is the way the city of man works!  
If you want to get ahead in Babylon – you have to learn the system –  
you have to learn to play by the rules!  
But the Christian cannot play by certain rules!

### 3. Royal Rage (v13-15)

<sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup> 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? <sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>[c]</sup> 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?”

Here in verses 13-15, we see clearly these two cities coming into view.  
Augustine spoke of the two cities in *The City of God*.

“There run throughout human history two cities,

which is to say, two movements, two principles, two loves...  
And where there are two loves there are naturally two worships...  
the ultimate expression of the direction and commitment  
of our heart and mind.” (Sumner, 137)

And the city of man is intractably opposed to the City of God.  
The ancient world was very pluralistic – in one sense –  
you can worship whatever you like –  
so long as you bow the knee to the King (and whatever god he serves!).

Modern pluralism is no different.  
You can worship whoever and whatever you like –  
so long as you bow the knee to modern pluralism!

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Lenin’s statue dominated Russia –  
and Chairman Mao’s statue dominated China.

It is tempting at times to say that Christians simply cannot get involved in politics –  
but then you have Daniel and his friends –  
they remain very involved in Babylonian and Persian politics!  
But the key is that they remain faithful to the Great Commandment:  
you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart!

You simply *may not bow* to any other god – any other image!

#### **4. The Answer: (v16-18)**

<sup>16</sup> *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>[d]</sup>*  
<sup>18</sup> *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.”*

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego only speak *once* in the whole story.  
Indeed, this is the only time that they speak in the whole book of Daniel.  
But this one line is enough!

The response of the three friends is remarkable.  
It would have been easy to compromise.  
It would have been easy to say, “Hey, I won’t mean it in my heart,  
I’ll just go through the outward motions.  
What good will it do for our people, if we are fried to a crisp?”

But instead they respond with a clear rejection of the King’s demands.  
The translation of verse 17 has perplexed many.  
The footnote in the ESV provides one rendering:

“If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, he will deliver us...”  
But most commentators have agreed that this makes no sense  
in the context of the book of Daniel!

Dale Ralph Davis argues for a slightly different translation of verse 17:

“If our God exists whom we are serving,  
he is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace –  
and from your hand, O king, he can deliver.”

They are not doubting God’s existence.

Rather, they are challenging Nebuchadnezzar’s unbelief.

But they also recognize that they do not know what God’s purposes are.

He is *able* to deliver us from your hand –  
but whether he will or not,  
we will still not serve your gods or worship the golden image.

But however you translate it,

there is a clear distinction between their uncertainty over whether God *will* save them,  
and their conviction that whether he does or not,  
they will not bow.

In other words, they *know* God’s revealed will – as found in the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment:

“you shall not make graven images – you shall not bow down and worship them”

And so, whether or not God rescues us in this situation,  
we will *not* obey you.

That takes courage!

Have you ever wondered how you would do if they came for you?

Sinclair Ferguson says it well,

“Faith means trusting in God and His Word.

Faith does not mean that we either know or understand  
what his specific purpose in our lives may be.

It means a ready willingness to follow Him whatever His purpose.” (70)

In one way, the real miracle is found here in verses 16-18.

That these three friends would stand firm before the greatest King on earth –  
knowing that their stand would likely cost them their life –  
*that* is the greatest miracle in our chapter.

What *really* matters to you?

### **3. Royal Rage: the Verdict, Part 1 (v19-23)**

<sup>19</sup> *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.* <sup>20</sup> *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.* <sup>21</sup> *Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics,<sup>[e]</sup> their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.* <sup>22</sup> *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.* <sup>23</sup> *And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.*

Notice that verse 19 parallels verse 13.

“in furious rage” from verse 13 is now echoed in “filled with fury.”

In this way, Nebuchadnezzar fits the stereotype of the ancient figure of the Great King, who always expects his every wish to be performed.

“The overheated state of the ruler is reflected in the overheated state of the oven. Both are out of control and kill their own.” (Sumner, 141)

But, if we are honest, how often is this true of us?

When we expect someone to do what we say,  
and then they *don't do it* –  
we often get upset.

Of course, Nebuchadnezzar is the Great King of Babylon –  
so who is going to tell him, “No!”?

And especially consider who Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are:  
they are minor bureaucrats – foreigners, to boot,  
with no influence and no powerful backers to protect them.

And so Nebuchadnezzar orders the fire stoked seven times hotter!  
He wants these men to be instantly incinerated!  
Indeed, so hot is the fire, that the mighty men who threw them in the flames  
were themselves overcome by the heat before they could throw them.  
(The picture is of the mighty men, standing at the edge of the furnace,  
ready to throw the three friends into the furnace –  
but being overcome by the heat and the flames,  
so that they drop their burdens,  
and so the three friends just sort of tumble and roll into the furnace instead).

But notice the contrast:

Nebuchadnezzar's servants perish in the flames.  
God's servants do *not!*

## **2. The Deliverance by the Son (v24-27)**

*<sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> 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.”*

Much ink has been spilt trying to determine the identity of the fourth man!

The author does not tell us who this is.

The only witness is Nebuchadnezzar,  
who says that the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods –  
or perhaps a Son of God  
(the Aramaic could be read either way).

We do not need to know exactly who it was.

Was it the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity?

Maybe.

If you think about the conclusion of the Aramaic section in chapter 7,  
you see the one like a Son of Man –  
who is most likely the same one whom Nebuchadnezzar sees here.

It is worth reflecting on Jesus’ words,

“where two or three are gathered in my name,  
there am I among them” (Matthew 18:20).

What we *need* to know is this:

Nebuchadnezzar was *right* to identify the savior as the Son of God.

Jesus *is* the one who visits his people in the midst of their afflictions and sufferings.

He is the image of the invisible God –  
the one who comforts us in our distress  
and rescues us from all our foes.

*<sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.*

Such is the power of God that not a hair on their heads was signed –  
no smell of fire or smoke has tainted them.

When you walk through the fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the LORD your God,

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isaiah 43:2-3)

### 1. King’s Decree: Vindication (v28-30)

<sup>28</sup> *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. <sup>29</sup> 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.”*  
<sup>30</sup> *Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

The chapter began with a decree to all “peoples, nations, and languages” –  
that they should worship the image.

Now there is a decree to all “people, nations, or languages”  
that they should not speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

I realize that we are only in chapter 3 –  
but I need to give you a hint of what is coming:

(of course, those of you who have sung Andrew Deliyannides’

“I Saw the Son of Man”

already have this line running through your head:

“I saw the Son of Man stand before the Ancient of Days  
where he was given: glory, and a kingdom, and dominion  
that all peoples and nations and languages should serve him.”)

That’s from Daniel 7 –

where Daniel sees a vision that ties together all that these first 6 chapters show us.

Here in chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar has commanded the peoples, nations, and languages  
to bow before *his* image.

But in chapter 7, it will be the Son of Man who will be given glory and a kingdom.

Notice that in verse 29, Nebuchadnezzar answers his own question from verse 15 –

“who is the god who will deliver you out of my hand?”

Well, the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is the God  
who is able to rescue in this way!

But Nebuchadnezzar stops short of actually *worshiping* this God.

Nebuchadnezzar is a polytheist.

He believes in many gods.

He is impressed with the God of Daniel’s friends,  
but not enough to set aside his other gods!

In this case, God rescued his people from the flames.  
But there are times when God does *not* rescue us.  
There are times when we must still endure the trials.

Dale Ralph Davis tells the story of a KGB agent who was sent to a Russian church  
to enforce submission to the Soviet government during Stalin's era.

This KGB agent saw an old woman kissing the feet of an icon of Jesus.  
He said, "Babushka, are you also prepared to kiss the feet of the beloved general secretary  
of our great Communist Party?"  
She quickly shot back, "Why of course! But only if you crucify him first!" (58)

Who will you worship?  
The only God worth worshipping  
is a God who not only meets his people in the midst of the fire –  
he comes and takes the fire upon himself.  
He was crucified for us – so that we might live through him.

And because he has endured the fire of God's wrath,  
we now experience the fire as those who are refined like gold –  
that we might be purified and made like him!