

VI. Crisis and the Christian in Biblical Perspective  
“The Answer to Crisis is in the Fiery Furnace”

Daniel 3

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This is the sixth of our seven part series. Daniel 3 is intentionally written with insights and repetition in order to communicate something to us as it is read as a whole. Daniel 3:1–30 says [1] *King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.* [2] *Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather **the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces** to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.* [3] *Then **the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces** gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.* [4] *And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages,* [5] *that when you hear the **sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music**, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.* [6] *And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.”* [7] *Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard **the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music**, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.*

[8] *Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews.* [9] *They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! [10] You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears **the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music**, shall fall down and worship the golden image. [11] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. [12] There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”*

[13] *Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. [14] Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? [15] Now if you are ready when you hear **the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music**, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?”*

[16] *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. [17] If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. [18] But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”*

[19] *Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times*

*more than it was usually heated. [20] And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. [21] Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. [22] Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. [23] And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.*

*[24] Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." [25] He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."*

*[26] Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. [27] And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. [28] Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.*

*[29] Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." [30] Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

The place was Dunkirk. It was the very outset of what we would know as WW II now. Almost the entire British army had been put into a bottle neck at Dunkirk on the French coastline surrounded by the German army, about to be utterly destroyed. They were implored by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, the other officials of Britain and the army commanders to please hold on. Can you hold on? They sent back a message that they would hold on and the message ended with an open sentence and three words. It said; "We will make every effort to hold on to the last man but if not..." In those days of Biblical literacy everyone knew they were quoting from Daniel 3. They were waiting for deliverance to come across the English Channel and were going to hold on for that deliverance but if it didn't come they would still hold on. That was their message.

You are about to find out why Daniel 3 really needs to be read in its entirety for in it is another one of these crises. I love the astonishing clarity, integrity and challenging nature of Biblical Christianity, not necessarily contemporary Christianity that is adulterated by so many things from the spirit of the age that creeps into the pulpits that preach the Word of God, but when you preach the Word of God with clarity expositionally it's astonishingly clear if you're honest with the text. One of the things that has been astonishing to me is working behind this series in this present distress and trying to understand the crisis and the Christian in Biblical perspective.

A passage that comes to me during this is from James 1:2–4 which says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

Notice that it doesn't say if you believe Jesus enough you won't have any tests or crises in a broken world. It says 'when' and not 'if' you meet various trials that become tests in your life so you not only know it's coming but you are to count it all joy, not necessarily because of the trial but because you know God is doing something. This brings me to the five lessons that we have gone through already in this series.

Lesson number one it was to live sensibly, righteously and Godly in this present age. The present age has present distresses. We are to be prudent without panic, to trust God without tempting God and we are to be fearless because of the faithfulness of God to His Word and to His people.

Lesson two we learned from a case study in Genesis 15 from Joseph's life and we saw in that lesson the multi-faceted dynamics of God's providence. God's providence is never singular but multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. God is multi-tasking in the midst of every crisis.

The third lesson we learned from Jesus when He was asked about two crises in Luke 13:1–5 and that lesson was the foundational and urgent message of repent or perish from our sins. This leads us to the fourth lesson that was from Nehemiah 1. When Nehemiah heard of the national and personal crisis we learned the foundational and urgent call to fervent prayer.

The fifth lesson is the real crisis in a crisis is how will you respond to the crisis; that will depend on how you view the crisis; and that ultimately depends on who is your King and Savior. Think about what happened to Daniel as a teenager probably 14 or 15. He came from a family of privilege on a fast track to a position of acclaim in the middle of Jerusalem with a magnificent temple and one morning in 605 BC King Nebuchadnezzar sweeps through and takes him, his friends and thousands of others into a Babylonian captivity. This king will also come back two more times to take more people. Under the providential hand of God He is disciplining His people as they are being taken into the Babylonian captivity. Daniel has now been given another name, a Babylonian one that gives reference to a pagan god, put into a Babylonian school, isolated, educated and indoctrinated with no one to appeal to.

Daniel and his friends learned how to cooperate without compromising by knowing where the line was. In Daniel 1 they honor that line which is indicated by the constant repetition in that chapter. They are in the king's service but there is no free lunch. Daniel basically tells us that he will not be dependent on this king, Nebuchadnezzar, because he has a greater King. There are seven repetitions in Daniel 1 about various things concerning this pagan king which was the issue Daniel was facing by being placed in the king's service. The way we are to respond to the crisis ultimately has to do with who our King and Savior is.

Then there is Daniel 2. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego not only withstood the crisis because of God's faithfulness but they were put in high positions of counselors to the king and arguably Nebuchadnezzar is the most powerful king that ever lived. I think it's true for he is brilliant man militarily and economically. He is a pagan man and very powerful. No one would stand against him so when he promoted you, then you really were promoted. In Daniel 2 he has this dream and no one wants to step up to tell him what it means. He finds out that Daniel has a God-given gift concerning the interpretation of these dreams.

Daniel is called upon to interpret the dream and he very graciously but pointedly tells him about this four part image the king dreamed of. He basically says 'the good news king is that

golden head is you so you're the head. That next empire is going to defeat you which is the Medo-Persians. The next one is the empire that will defeat them and that will be the Grecian empire and the next one that will defeat them is the Roman Empire.' The king was so impressed by Daniel's interpretation that he basically promoted Daniel as head over everything.

Now we fast forward about 16 to 18 years and most of the invasions of Jerusalem have been completed. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have been made leaders in the court of the king. Nebuchadnezzar decides he doesn't want to hear the dream of the sovereign God of history. This dream Daniel interpreted is a prophecy. What is God saying? Prophecy is nothing more than pre-written history. It's the God of history telling you before it occurs what the historical facts are going to be. This king doesn't want the God of history to be sovereign over him so he decides to take the top of the image he dreamed of and make it the image for he thinks nothing will topple him.

So in Daniel 3 the king makes himself an image and sets it up on a platform for all to see. Archeologists have uncovered in the place of the plain of Dura, a large platform that likely was tall upon which this image was put. Daniel 3:1 gives us the measurements of the platform. The image was about 8 feet wide and approximately 90 feet high, made all of gold. Then Nebuchadnezzar has a dedication service for this new god/image that everyone is to worship. Like all idolatry, the god is there to be worshiped because we're the ones who set it up and what we're really worshipping is ourselves. To worship the image was to worship Nebuchadnezzar.

The repetition in Daniel 3 rather rapidly ascended or descended, however you want to look at it, into redundancy. Clearly it doesn't need to be repeated unless it is being emphasized for some reason. This is a Biblical device for emphasis so always be on the alert for it when you're reading the Word. God has only ordained the Bible to be a certain size so when things are repeated that is telling us something is important. There are four repetitions in this chapter.

The first repetition is the fact that Nebuchadnezzar is the one who put all of this into motion. Nebuchadnezzar made the image. Nebuchadnezzar set up the image. Nebuchadnezzar gathered the people with the command that everyone is to worship the image. We see these phrases in some fashion repeated 12 times in Daniel 3. This is about Nebuchadnezzar declaring his sovereignty over all of the gods of the age and that would include the God of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel. This also points out Nebuchadnezzar's centrality.

The second repetition was that every tribe, every nation, all the peoples, where the king had control were all called to worship. No one is to be found absent. There were to be no exceptions. All were to be represented and it must have been quite the processional.

The third repetition was every position in the empire—the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces—was to be there to worship.

The fourth repetition is that every instrument—the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music—was to be used in the processional of worship and praise. I can't believe a bagpipe would be used for such an ungodly enterprise. All this was brought together for the purpose of worshipping the king.

There were three that were absent. Daniel was absent for the reason we are told at the end of Daniel 2 that he was at the king's court but Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are now on their own. They are not there to worship. Some of the Chaldeans were keeping their eye on them and maliciously reported them. In other words, they were watching what they were doing. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who are probably now in their late 20s are very clearly establishing a reputation with all eyes upon them—how will you live and what will you

do now? Their inside guy Daniel, wasn't here with these three. What are they going to do without him? Very humbly but boldly they weren't going to worship the image.

The report about this went to the king with a little jab—*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* (Daniel 3:12). The king had given a twofold command—you either come to worship and bow down in adoration or you will be burned to death by cremation.

So King Nebuchadnezzar calls the three to himself and is going to ask two important questions. Question one is what God is there to deliver you from my hand? Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have also got a law which is called the law of God. The second commandment is in Exodus 20:3–6 which says [3] *“You shall have no other gods before me.* [4] *“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.* [5] *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,* [6] *but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

They tell the king they have no need to answer to him for they have already answered to the Lord that they would be faithful to Him. This is what Paul did. They are ready to suffer for Christ's sake. This is Peter and John when they said ‘we must obey God rather than men.’ This is the truth of Scripture. Peter says in I Peter 4:12, [12] *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* He also says in I Peter 3:15, [15] *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.* This is where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are out of love to the God who has promised to be their King and Savior. They will depend upon Him, will not serve any other king, bow down to any other, or break God's law which teaches them how to love the Lord with their heart, soul and mind and how to rightly love their neighbor as themselves.

No longer does Nebuchadnezzar have a benevolent look upon these three or is a patron of these three, but now he becomes the adversary. He commands them to be put in this fiery furnace that is to be heated up seven times hotter which is the perfect number, meaning it's the ultimate temperature. The men who work for the king load them up in clothes and they are bound up. The three of them are cast into the fire which is so hot that it burns up those who are throwing them into the fire.

As Nebuchadnezzar stops to think about what he has done to them for how they responded to him, he wants to know about them. As comes to this furnace he doesn't see three bound but he sees four unbound walking around untouched by the flames. The fourth one is like unto the son of God. Nebuchadnezzar has them extracted from the furnace and everyone realizes they have no odor, smell or singe of fire on them. When God delivers He delivers. Nebuchadnezzar is overwhelmed by it. He hasn't got it yet for there is nothing here about tearing the image down but he is drawn to it. Nebuchadnezzar was drawn to it in Daniel 1 and Daniel 2 and again in Daniel 3. In Daniel 4 Nebuchadnezzar will get converted. Here he is being witnessed to by Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Now this king asks a second question—what kind of God delivers like this? There is no god I know that delivers like this—what does he mean when he says ‘like this’? First, note the careful way his first question—what god is there that can deliver you from my hand—was

answered. They responded in Daniel 3:17–18 which says [17] *If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. [18] But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.*

Notice they did not say ‘our God *will* deliver us from the fire’ for there’s no promise in the Bible for that. There have been many believers who have been burned up by fire but He is able to deliver us from the fire. Note verse 18, for they basically say He will deliver them from Nebuchadnezzar. The hand of a false god cannot hold us. The power of the flesh cannot keep us. Matthew Henry, a commentator, says this is what they knew—O king your supreme weapon is death, our supreme weapon is dying. Philippians 1:21 says [21] *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* So the king’s supreme weapon is a gift to them, but they live and die unto Christ because their life was not the king or his table or his god or the position he promoted them to. Their life was the Lord’s. He is the Redeemer of our life.

The takeaway is the Christ-exalting faithfulness of God’s people to the faithfulness of God’s grace in the day of crisis not only establishes a witness to God, it also multiplies witnesses for God, both willing and unwilling. If you fly the flag for Jesus (live unto Christ) which is what we’re called to do then let me assure you people have their eye on you. Today if you’re a professing believer you’re a witness, now you may be a good witness or you may be a bad witness but you’re a witness and people are taking ideas about God by looking at the way you’re living. In the midst of a crisis, all eyes look at professing believers, but they’re not all looking for the same reason.

Some are curious, like Nebuchadnezzar for in this text he is charmed but is not yet converted. He is being drawn and attracted but is not yet changed. Then there were others who looked upon with jealousy, envy and maliciousness. Here is this procession, with all these various leaders, people and instruments, of idolatrous worship and it becomes a parade of witnesses to the power of God. Notice that every one of them are repeated at the end of Daniel 3 as witness as to what God had done in His faithfulness to the faithfulness of His people. All eyes were upon them and not for benevolent reasons necessarily. They saw the faithfulness of God that enabled the faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and affirmed their faithfulness. That is no small deal.

What would you have done if you had been in Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s place? You would die by cremation if you don’t bow down and worship. Would you have said ‘hey Daniel’s not here, we can get away with this’ or ‘we’ll just do it one time’ or ‘there’s no such thing as a real idol anyway’? Would you have been drawn to rationalize the situation? They said ‘we cooperate but we don’t compromise, so we will be burned up in cremation rather than fall down in adoration to these idols.’ The result is the parade of idolaters become a procession of witnesses to a God who is able to save from the fire but always saves through the fire. He always delivers us.

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego take their place who would be followed by people like Luther who said ‘here I stand I can do no other’ and others like Latimer and Ridley who said ‘today as we are burned alive we shall light a candle that shall not be put out in all of England.’ They joined the faithful who reflect the faithfulness of God and bear the faithfulness of God. It is all because of their God. What kind of a God saves like this?

Nebuchadnezzar had read the stories of gods who would wipe out fiery furnaces but he had never seen the God who would go into the furnace to save His people—as Jesus went into hell itself on the cross to save us from that fiery furnace and deliver us from the hand of sin,

Satan, death and the world. We all have an appointment. Hebrews 9:27 says [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.*

Don't worry for that's a great moment. It's a moment of anticipation and not trepidation. Why? Those two appointments you will keep with a blessed Hope because Jesus kept the appointment for you, your judgment, and your hell at the cross therefore we live. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to know the glory of our God who at appointed times delivers from the fire and who all the time delivers through the fire because of Christ who took our judgment and will bring us home through the shadow of death. We give You praise for the Savior who enables us to be faithful in a moment of crisis and in that moment uses our witness to create multitudes of witnesses, some willing some unwilling and some on the road to conversion as they see Your faithfulness in us and to us such as Nebuchadnezzar. There are some who mock but one day will have to praise You. We today will praise You. Great is Your faithfulness O God of glory. We praise You Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Power Point

LIFE TAKEAWAYS

Lesson #1: Sensibly, Righteous and Godly in the Present Age

Lesson #2: The Multi-faceted Dynamics of God's Sovereign Providence

Lesson #3: The Foundational and Urgent Message—Repent or Perish!

Lesson #4: The Foundational and Urgent Call to Fervent Prayer

Lesson #5: The real Crisis in a crisis is how you respond to the crisis

THE SETTING

THE STORY

LIFE TAKEAWAY

*The Christ-exalting faithfulness of God's people to the faithfulness of God's grace in the day of crisis not only establishes a witness to God, it also multiplies witnesses for God, both willing and unwilling.*