

Daniel 3

- Daniel's third chapter moves us forward one step in the chiasm I described last week

- The chiasm of chapters 2-7 can be charted this way:

A - The prophecy concerning four Gentile empires that dominate Israel and the world

B - God delivers Daniel's friends from Gentile persecution

C - God humbles the Gentile king (Nebuchadnezzar) to demonstrate His sovereignty

C' - God deposes the Gentile king (Belshazzar) to demonstrate His sovereignty

B' - God delivers Daniel from Gentile persecution

A' - The prophecy concerning four Gentile empires that dominate Israel and the world

- As I said last week, Daniel's opening chapters are organized in this way to help us make sense of God's (seemingly) contradictory plan for Israel
 - In some chapters, God is revealing His plan for a millennia-long Gentile domination of Israel
 - In other chapters, God reassures the Jewish people that these rulers remain under God's sovereign control
 - Despite the overwhelming might of these nations, God remains at the helm steering the rudder of history
- Furthermore, the Lord is still protecting the faithful within Israel
 - The remnant, believing Israel, will be caught up in the scattering and captivity
 - But nevertheless, the Lord is still with them
 - The nation will not be extinguished during the Age of the Gentiles
 - And furthermore, God will show Himself strong in defense of the remnant
- Chapter 3 of Daniel corresponds to Point B in the chiasm, which is the Lord moving to defend the faith remnant among the exiles in Babylon
 - In particular, Daniel's three friends will be caught up in a political trap set by the king's other counselors

- Let's move into chapter 3 with king Nebuchadnezzar again

Dan. 3:1 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.

Dan. 3:2 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.

Dan. 3:3 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.

Dan. 3:4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language,

Dan. 3:5 that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.

Dan. 3:6 "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire."

Dan. 3:7 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.

- Nebuchadnezzar sets about creating his own massive statue
 - It's logical to assume there is a connection between the statue in the dream of chapter 2 and Nebuchadnezzar's statue
 - Daniel has organized his book so that these two events are described back-to-back
 - So that detail alone would lead us to draw a connection
 - And we know this chapter follows the events of chapter 2 because Daniel's friends are in their roles as administrators over Babylon
 - But how close in time are the events of chapter 2 and chapter 3?
 - The timing of this chapter's events is a matter of some guesswork
 - Several possibilities for when Nebuchadnezzar built this statue exist, but I think the most likely answer is after 585 BC

- In that year, Nebuchadnezzar reached his limit of patience with the Jewish people
- It's been 20 years since he first conquered the city and took Daniel captive
- And in those two decades, he was forced to contend with one insurrection after another in Judea
- He had been forced to return to the city once already to replace a rebellious king and reassert his authority
- And then in 585 BC after another rebellion, he returned a third and final time to lay waste to what remained of the city and temple
 - He destroyed the walls rendering the city indefensible
 - He razed the temple to its foundation
 - And he carried off the rest of the Jews into slavery
 - Leaving behind a city in ruin
- That final victory over Israel may be the occasion that prompted Nebuchadnezzar to build his statue
 - He had received Daniel's interpretation of the dream, so he knew he had been granted power by Daniel's God to rule the earth
 - But now he had successfully defeated the very nation this God claimed for Himself
 - Moreover, the king has completely obliterated Yahweh's personal temple on earth
 - Under those circumstances, we have to wonder if Nebuchadnezzar had begun to think he defeated God
 - As if the king had succeeded in rewriting the history represented by the timeline of the statue
 - If so, he might have presumed there would no longer be a second kingdom
 - Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar would rule without end

- After all, if Nebuchadnezzar was capable of crushing the temple of the God who gave him his power, then who could challenge him?
- For that matter, does Israel's God even exist any longer?
- So I presume Nebuchadnezzar orders the construction of this statue to commemorate his defeat of Israel and Yahweh
- The description of the statue would seem to support this conclusion
 - First it's an image made entirely of gold
 - We remember of course that the statue in the dream began with gold, but it progressed into other metals
 - Each metal represented a new empire, and each new empire came to power by defeating the prior Gentile kingdom
 - Nebuchadnezzar understood that the Lord intended to replace Babylon at some point, and we can be sure he didn't like it
 - So by making his statue out of only gold, Nebuchadnezzar's message is clear
 - He now believes his rule will never end
 - Gold (that is Babylon) will reign forever
- As the final group of Jewish exiles were marched into Babylon following Nebuchadnezzar's attack, they would have joined their countrymen in captivity
 - They would have brought with them accounts of Jerusalem's destruction
 - They would have told of the falling walls
 - Of the city's destruction
 - And they would have reported that the temple was gone
 - Can you imagine how the Jews in captivity would have taken the news?
 - Perhaps they were starting to doubt the promises of their fathers
 - Many of the exiles must have questioned whether Israel was destined to disappear altogether

- And certainly, many Jews decided to leave their nation and the Lord behind
- Other Jews remained true to Yahweh and to His covenant
 - At this time in history, the Jewish people began the practice of meeting in synagogues
 - They had little choice since they were living in exile and lacked a temple
 - They also formed many of the religious traditions that persist today
 - In fact, you could say that modern Judaism began during the exile
- Nevertheless, the destruction of the city and the temple must have tested the faith of every believer in exile
 - Now we see why God delivered Daniel's interpretation of the dream so early in their period of captivity
 - Daniel revealed the meaning of the statue in barely the third year of Israel's captivity
 - He was preparing the remnant in Israel to understand coming events so as to encourage them
 - Seventeen years later when the city walls fell for the last time, the remnant could see those circumstances with a view to God's sovereign purpose
 - They remained strong in faith knowing the Lord foretold it
 - But understanding God's plan is one thing...living in the light of that revelation is quite another
 - The real test for the remnant comes when Nebuchadnezzar demands that all people worship his statue
- We don't know what the statue looked like, but it probably wasn't a copy of the statue in the dream
 - For one thing, the dimensions are very unlike normal human proportions
 - It was tall, slender and made of solid gold

- It was ten times taller than it was wide
- It was 90 feet high, equal to an eight-story building, and it was about 9 feet wide
- If this image was of a man, then it would have resembled a 6 ft man with a 7 inch chest
- Therefore, we must conclude this object was shaped more like an obelisk, similar to those set up in Egypt
- The image was set up on the plain of Dura, which is a word that means an area enclosed or walled
 - It was somewhere near the capital city
 - But it was set on a plain, far from other structures, so that it might stand out
 - Something like the Washington Monument standing in Death Valley surrounded in the distance by mountains
- In v.5 the king assembled his government to carry out his orders
 - The various agents represent Nebuchadnezzar's military, judicial, economic, and governmental leaders from all levels of the nation
 - He informs them that from this point forward, the image will be the center of worship for everyone in the nation
 - Specifically, they were to bow whenever music is played
 - The king is referring specifically to a worship moment which always involved musical instruments
 - The list of instruments includes both traditional Babylonian instruments and Persian instruments
 - So he's demanding that people no matter their culture or allegiance fall in line with this new single object of worship
 - Notice he adds that Daniel adds in v.7 that people of "all languages" were required to obey this command
 - From these details, we come to understand that Nebuchadnezzar was less interested in establishing a new religious practice

- He's working to ensure political loyalty and submission to his absolute authority
- Remember, we're still relatively early in the history of the Babylonian empire following its defeat of Assyria
- So Nebuchadnezzar is working to consolidate power and expose disloyalty in his government
- And of course, the whole affair is also an exercise in pride and hubris
 - Assuming the image was square, an object of this size would have required about 4,400 tons of gold
 - And 4,400 tons of 24k gold would be worth \$204 trillion today, or roughly equal to the number of cat videos on the internet
 - This was Nebuchadnezzar's absurd testimony (i.e., 10:1 ratio) of his superiority over any other god, including the God of Israel
- As a means of exposing disloyalty, his tactic probably wasn't very effective in the polytheistic cultures of Babylon and Persia
 - These were people comfortable with worshipping images and many different gods
 - It probably wasn't a huge sacrifice to switch from their traditional images to this new one
 - So I doubt Nebuchadnezzar's display of grandeur exposed much opposition within his government
 - On the other hand, this kind of test is tailor made for exposing dissent among the Jews, whose Law specifically prohibited worship of graven images
 - Now we see the Lord's hand at work behind the scenes
 - He brought Nebuchadnezzar to this moment specifically to test the hearts of His people, Israel
 - In the case of Daniel's friends, the test becomes especially severe
 - In v.6 Nebuchadnezzar declares, quite dramatically, that anyone who failed to abide by his command would be thrown into a furnace fire
 - Excavations in the area of Babylon have uncovered massive ovens

- Babylon's furnaces were used to bake the bricks for the nation's buildings and walls
- If you've seen pictures of the ruins of Babylon in Iraq, then you've seen the product of those ovens
- These are the very same ovens that held Daniel's friends
- Ancient documents from the time describe disobedient slaves being thrown into these ovens, so the king's idea wasn't novel

Dan. 3:8 For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews.

Dan. 3:9 They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: "O king, live forever!

Dan. 3:10 "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.

Dan. 3:11 "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.

Dan. 3:12 "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."

- Daniel reports that the king's edict gave opportunity for certain Chaldeans to bring charges against the Jews serving in the king's court
 - Remember, we said at the end of last week's teaching that Daniel's sudden success at a very young age would have created enemies
 - The king's other counselors would have been intensely jealous of Daniel's instant promotion over them
 - And they would probably have feared that someone with Daniel's insight might expose them as frauds or incompetent
 - And that dislike also transferred to Daniel's three friends, who had promoted alongside him
 - Normally, these counselors would have waited and watched until their adversary slipped up, doing something to incriminate themselves or give rise to an accusation
 - But in this case, Daniel and his friends were righteous in their behavior and incorruptible in their character

- So these men needed a break
- And Daniel says, “for this reason” they have their opportunity
- In other words, God gave Daniel’s enemies the break they were waiting for in the form of this edict
- The king’s edict exposed the Jews’ commitment to show allegiance to Yahweh over the king
 - This is always the expectation for God’s people
 - Our allegiance to God is never second place to anything in this world
 - For the Jewish people, the Law demanded that they have no gods before the Lord
 - Not only would they not worship false images, but they would not put the commands of men above the precepts of God
 - The New Testament believer is under similar expectations, as Jesus said

Mark 12:17 And Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they were amazed at Him.

- The government deserves our honor and obedience, as Jesus says give what is required to the Roman ruler Caesar
- But then He adds that we must likewise render to God what God has reserved for Himself
- And the Lord has reserved for Himself our worship and our obedience, even above our allegiance to the government
- As Paul teaches

Rom. 13:7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

- Paul says we give to all what is due
 - Certain things are due to the government, which the Lord has appointed over us for our good

- Similarly, we should render honor to the society in which we live by observing customs as expected
- But we also render fear to God, and our fear of God must trump our fear of men
- In other words, when our obedience to God comes into conflict with our obedience to human rulers, we will face a fearful choice
 - One way or the other, we are going to make someone upset, which will cause us to fear for the consequences
 - Either we will choose to obey the Lord and disobey the government
 - In which case we will have reason to fear the government's response to our disobedience
 - Or we will choose to obey the government and disobey the Lord
 - In which case, we will have good reason to fear what the Lord may do in response to our disobedience
 - Paul says when we face that choice, we should render fear to whom deserves our fear...and Who deserves our fear?

Luke 12:4 "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do.

Luke 12:5 "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!

- According to Jesus, the One Who deserves your fear is God
 - The earthly ruler you upset can only take revenge so far
 - But the Lord can take revenge much farther, so fear Him more
 - If you make your priority preserving your earthly peace, then you risk your eternal reward, as Jesus said

Matt. 10:37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Matt. 10:38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

Matt. 10:39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

- That's the dilemma faced by Daniel's friends
- The Chaldeans notice that Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego have declined to bow and worship the image as required
 - These three men apparently didn't attempt to hide their disobedience
 - For example, we might imagine them bowing on cue but in their hearts praying to Yahweh instead of the statue
 - They would not have been worshipping the obelisk, though they may have appeared to be in compliance
 - I've heard stories of missionaries praying to Jesus when the local mosque calls for Muslims to pray
 - They bow and pray, but they pray in their heart to Jesus
 - The actions of Daniel's friends strongly suggest that there is something wrong with any compromise that conceals our true worship so as to avoid drawing attention to our disobedience
 - The circumstances of Daniel 3 suggest strongly that God expects our public worship behavior to comport with our private understanding of Him
 - When the world demands we bow to a false god, we do not have license to comply outwardly while secretly disagreeing in our hearts
 - Our behavior IS our testimony, so to behave in any way contrary to our beliefs is sin
 - Furthermore, this violates the spirit of the 2nd commandment which forbids graven images
 - A graven image isn't just a false god
 - A graven image also refers to images that stand for the true God
 - So we cannot bow to any image in worship, even if we tell ourselves we are secretly worshipping the true God
 - We are violating God's commandment, and consequently such worship will not be accepted by God
- Instead, we must be prepared to accept the consequences of disobeying men so that we might please the Lord

- That is what Daniel's friends did, and as a result their enemies used their faithfulness to God as cause to cast accusations against them
 - In v.12 they tell the king these three were not willing to comply with the king's orders
 - In v.11 they conveniently reminded the king that he ordered those who will not comply be thrown into the fire
 - These conspirators seem to have found the perfect solution to their problem
 - But it's one God Himself has constructed for a greater purpose
- We might wonder at this point why Daniel wasn't caught up in the accusations?
 - No one knows for sure
 - Perhaps these conspirators were too afraid of Daniel's power to accuse him
 - Or perhaps Daniel was somewhere else and couldn't be observed
 - For this reason perhaps Daniel receives his own moment of testing later in the book
- Finally, there is an interesting picture emerging in the story of Nebuchadnezzar
 - We know from chapter 2 that Nebuchadnezzar is the first ruler in the Age of the Gentiles
 - He was the head of gold
 - He is the single most powerful man on earth in his day
 - All nations and peoples and even the animals have been given over to his authority
 - At the opposite end of the statue, we learned that the age will end when Jesus Christ returns to set up His eternal Kingdom
 - His return comes at the point of the "ten toes" on the statue, which we have yet to see explained in the book of Daniel
 - Later in chapter 7 we learn about these "toes"

- Also later we learn that as the Age of Gentiles comes to its end, one man will have gained all power over all people and nations in that day
- Therefore, the Age of the Gentiles will come to an end under circumstances very similar to the way it begins
 - It starts with one Gentile man ruling the entire world
 - And it will end with one Gentile man ruling the whole world
 - It starts with a king requiring all his subjects to worship an image he erects in his own honor
 - And it will end with a king requiring the whole world to worship an image he erects in his own honor
 - We'll learn more about this connection when we reach chapter 7
- When the king learns of the boys' rebellion, he becomes enraged and reacts in a predictable way

Dan. 3:13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.

Dan. 3:14 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?"

Dan. 3:15 "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?"

Dan. 3:16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter.

Dan. 3:17 "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.

Dan. 3:18 "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."

- The king is angered and demands the three appear before him
 - I'm sure they were ushered in unceremoniously and probably roughly
 - The king asks them whether what he has heard is true

- But it's clear this was a rhetorical question, since we don't see him waiting for an answer
- He decides there's no reason to entertain a discussion, since it's easy enough to settle the matter one way or there other
- He simply puts the demand to them once again
 - Will they bow down to the image?
 - And if they will not, he repeats the threat to put them in fire
 - Imagine the fear you would feel in this moment?
- Stories like this tend to lose their impact for experienced Bible students because we know how the story ends
 - Knowing there will be a miraculous outcome robs the scene of some of its drama
 - We see the men's courage as logical given what God is prepared to do
 - But these men didn't know the end of the story
- So try to put yourself back in the moment with these men
 - They were hustled into this moment without warning, without a chance to prepare their hearts, without time to pray
 - They find themselves standing before the most powerful man in the world, who is visibly upset with them
 - He's probably shouting as he declares they are moments away from a painful death
- Understanding the situation they faced makes their response all the more admirable
 - First, they say they don't need to answer the king
 - They mean he already knows what they are going to say
 - Just as the king's question was rhetorical, their answer is obvious
 - They are Jews; they will not worship an image

- Furthermore, they declare their God is more powerful than Nebuchadnezzar, and He can deliver them from the furnace if He chooses
 - Then they add that even if the Lord should choose not to deliver them under these circumstances, it matters not
 - Not even death is reason to turn their backs on God's word
- Many a Bible commentator has remarked on the noble response of these men
 - They have taken the command of scripture to love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your strength
 - And they have made obedience their aim in life
 - God's glory before the nations was more important to them their own security and even their very lives
- Perhaps more amazing is their unwavering trust in God's sovereignty
 - It's one thing to stand firm against the king by saying God will save me
 - But it's another thing altogether to stand firm knowing God may decide not to save you
 - Too often we conflate God's *potential* to act with God's *willingness* to act
 - God is capable of all things, yes, but self-evidently He only does certain things
 - Therefore, our resolve to remain obedient in times of testing cannot be based on an expectation that God is obligated to respond to our faithfulness according to our desires
 - That's a quid pro quo, and it's superficial obedience at best
 - It's equivalent to a child who does his chores merely to receive his allowance
 - That's not obedience...that's employment
 - The true test of whether our hearts are obedient is whether we will serve the Lord even if His will is to see us suffer for that obedience

- Remember, God's own Son was not spared from suffering despite living a life of perfect obedience to the Father
- And no slave is above his Master
- Therefore, we must leave room for the same possibility
- When we live this way, we please the Lord
 - We won't be disappointed or discouraged when our obedience isn't met with prosperity, happiness and easy living
 - God can do all things, but He only does what is good, right and best
- In the case of these men, the right thing was to allow the king to carry through on his threats and then to manifest Himself in the result

Dan. 3:19 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.

Dan. 3:20 He commanded certain valiant warriors who were in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast them into the furnace of blazing fire.

Dan. 3:21 Then 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.

Dan. 3:22 For 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.

Dan. 3:23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.

- The king's rage transfers to the temperature of the fire
 - He orders that the furnace be turned up 7 times hotter
 - The number 7 represents completion
 - So Daniel isn't saying the furnace was necessarily exactly 700% hotter
 - He's saying the king ordered the furnace to its maximum temperature (i.e., turning it up to "11")
 - The furnace itself was probably an adobe structure several stories tall and lined with natural stones that could withstand the heat

- The top of the structure was open to exhaust the fumes
- Moving down the structure you would find various openings into which the clay bricks were inserted to cure in the furnace
- At the bottom were opening for shoveling in the wood and removing ash
- The three men are probably led to one of the openings toward the top of the oven
 - They would have ascended the structure on a series of ramps or stairs
 - We can imagine the three Jewish men in the front of the procession
 - The guards follow them, forcing them to climb ever higher on the structure
- Finally, the guards then push the three Jewish men into the furnace through one of the openings in the side of the furnace
 - Notice that these men fell into the furnace fully clothed and tied up
 - These details become more important in the next passage of the chapter
- After depositing Daniel's friends in the furnace, these guards would have then climbed back down
 - And on their way down, fire from inside the oven suddenly belches outward through one of the lower openings
 - And the guards are consumed
 - Ironically, Nebuchadnezzar's rage blinded the king into doing something foolish
 - If he truly wanted to inflict maximum punishment upon these three men, he would have ordered the oven turned lower, not higher
 - Setting the oven to a low temperature would have prolonged their agony
 - But by increasing the temperature, he ensured a quick and relatively painless death

- His hasty decision also resulted in some of his own men dying
 - That outcome is a signature move by God
 - It revealed God at work to fulfill His promises to Abraham
 - That is, those who curse Israel will receive the very curses themselves
- For the Jew, this detail was important
 - It signified that even when an all-powerful world ruler has taken Israel's captivity destroyed the temple, God is still on His throne keeping His covenants
 - This is the central message of the chapter
 - The lives of these three men are finding their purpose in this testimony
 - In a sense, we can say that the Lord has placed these men in this situation so that by their testimony they can give meaning to Israel's defeat
 - And they can give encouragement to God's people

Dan. 3:24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; 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."

Dan. 3:25 He said, "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!"

Dan. 3:26 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.

Dan. 3:27 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.

- The lower most level of these furnace featured large openings tall enough to walk through
 - These opens allowed men to refuel and stoke the fires

- Through these openings someone outside the furnace could watch the fire burning inside
- So apparently the king has stationed himself at this point so he can peer into the fire of the furnace from a safe distance
- Naturally, he expects to see three bodies fall from above and instantly burst into flame under the intense heat
 - Instead, he stands up in astonishment as he witnesses men standing and moving around in the furnace fire seemingly unharmed
 - And not three men only but a fourth man as well
- The king also sees the men are loosed (unbound)
 - Their ropes have been taken away, perhaps burned away
 - Now they are free
- Finally, the king remarks that the appearance of the fourth man is different
 - He describes him as a son of gods
 - His words mean a human who appeared to have divine power
 - Remember, he worshipped pagan gods often portrayed in the likeness of men or animals
- We know that Nebuchadnezzar's words were more correct than he could have known, coming about 600 years early
 - This fourth person was the Angel of the Lord
 - The Angel of the Lord is always the Person of Christ prior to His incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth
 - Even before He took on flesh, the Lord Jesus was still at work in His Creation
 - And in fact, Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 both teach that all visible manifestations of God are always the work of the Second Person of the Godhead
 - So when Christ makes an appearance in the Old Testament, He's called the Angel of the Lord

- Though that name is not given here specifically, we know by the miraculous nature of the moment and the king's comment that this is Christ
- He appears in the fire to save these men
- They are saved from heat, toxic fumes, and lack of oxygen
- They were even saved from the fall from a great height
- When the Lord saves us, He truly saves
- They remain in the fire until the king calls them out
 - Presumably, they could have run out immediately, but they remain in the furnace
 - It seems the Lord wanted to make a point to the king more than simply saving the men
 - He wants the king to be convinced
- And of course it worked, for the king called them out and they emerged stunned everyone watching
 - Quite a crowd had assembled to see this moment
 - The king probably required their presence
 - He wanted to show his power against those who would challenge him
 - As the three walk out unharmed, even their clothes are untouched
 - There is not even an odor from the furnace in their clothes
 - Here's where the clothing becomes an important element in the story
 - Normally, we might expect condemned men to lose their clothing prior to their execution
 - This was certainly the usual practice
 - We still find it practiced in Jesus day as He was stripped of his clothing at the cross

- But these men were allowed to keep their clothing, presumably because the king's anger propelled the soldiers to act with extreme haste
- God even preserved it from the flame
- God ensured these men would emerge from the furnace with both their lives and their dignity intact
 - The king had attempted to kill them and to do so in a way that made an examples out of them
 - But in the process, God has set the example
 - He has consumed His adversaries, vindicated His faithful, restoring their dignity while vacating the king's orders
 - The king shows he received the lesson, declaring these three are servants of the Most High God, a declaration he repeats seven times
- To the Jew in captivity, this account would have been a source of real encouragement
 - The dream in chapter 2 foretold that Israel would suffer under Gentile kings
 - But the events of chapter 3 remind God's people that these kings still remain under God's sovereign control
 - Israel cannot defeat these Gentiles powers since the Lord has appointed them to rule over Israel for a time
 - But neither can these Gentiles defeat God's faithful for the Lord continues to honor His word and His covenants to them
 - In fact, their judgment during the Age of the Gentiles is itself a result of God's promises to Israel in His covenant
 - But this scene is also a source of encouragement to every man or woman who follows Christ in faith
 - The three men walking up the stairs to their death can said to represent all believers
 - We carry our burdens of sin with us, all that we possess

- We are bound by that sin, declared guilty and sentenced to death in the eternal fire that never dies
- But as we fall our faith in Jesus saves us from destruction
 - Jesus Himself enters the furnace so as to save us from the judgment
 - Jesus cuts our bonds and free us unharmed
- After the men emerge, the king recognizes to a degree the lesson the Lord was teaching

Dan. 3:28 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.

Dan. 3:29 "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."

Dan. 3:30 Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

- The king begins to put the pieces together
 - He declares these men are blessed
 - He acknowledges they placed their trust in the right place, in their God
 - And yet he acknowledges they defied his orders in the process
 - Interestingly, the king doesn't try to gloss over the fact that this men disobeyed his orders
 - Their survival has made such an impression on the king that he drops any pretense of saving face or honor in the face of their triumph
 - He acknowledges this outcome as God-ordained and he yields to it
 - And he declares these men deserve praise for standing up for what they believed

- Then he reverses his prior edict to have these men punished for their defiance
 - As the unchallenged sovereign in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had the authority to reverse earlier decisions with impunity
 - This will not be the case for the Persian rulers later in this book
- His new decree is that no one may speak a word against the God of these men
 - He removes any threat against them arising out of their worship of Yahweh
 - Furthermore, he sets the stage for future generations of Jews to exist alongside Babylon and later the Medo-Persians without fear
 - They will remain in captivity for some time longer
 - But they will not longer see their worship of the true God inhibited
 - Here again is a strong encouragement for the Jew in exile
 - The Lord may have placed them in difficult circumstances
 - But He will expect them to continue in their faithful obedience to His commands even in the exile
 - And now He has made sure they may do so without an impediment
- The ending of this story serves as another picture of how the end of the Age of the Gentiles will proceed
 - In a future day, Israel will find itself subjected to a fiery trial from a single world ruler
 - In that trial, the nation will seem to be at its end
 - And the temptation to repudiate the Lord will be great, for it will seem like the only way to survive
 - But in the last moment, the Lord will appear to save Israel from their trial and preserve against their enemy
 - And the result will be Israel left unharmed
 - And their enemies will acknowledge the Lord's superiority

- We will continue to look into these parallels with increasing detail as we move further into the chapters of Daniel