

Daniel Chapter 3 - John Karmelich

1. One of the interesting characteristics about both Judaism and Christianity is that we serve God no matter what the circumstances. If we are in pain, we praise God. If God takes our life suddenly, we praise God with our dying breath. If a terrible wrong is committed against us, we are to praise God. If somebody wrongfully cheats us, we praise God.
 - a) By the way, it does not mean to be passive against humanity when wrongs occur. We'll see that in this lesson. The point is our attitude toward God.
 - b) Why is that? Why can't we thank God when things are going well and be angry at Him when things are not going well? Why shouldn't we blame Him when our circumstances don't go the way we want them to? Which is asking the question, "If God is so good, why does He allow us to suffer?"
 - i) That was Job's question. The interesting thing is when you read Job, he never gets his question answered. God *allowed* Job to go through suffering to test his faith, but Job is never revealed this mystery. In the end, when God speaks to Job, he rebukes him by saying, "Who are *you* to question me? Where were you when I made the heavens and earth." John's translation: "I have great plans for you. It is about trusting Me (God). It is about trusting Me when things go well and it is about trusting Me when things go wrong.
 - ii) This is the focus of Christianity in our relationship to God. God wants the ideal parent/child relationship where we, as his children, trust God as little children totally dependent upon our parents. As little children, we cannot comprehend *why* our parents make us do certain things, but as we grow up, we realize it was all done for our good. *That* is what God does, working through us. We don't know the future, but God does. We don't know *why* we go through horrible circumstances, but God does. Maturity, as a Christian, is the ability to trust God more and more as one grows in our relationship with God.
 - c) Let's get back to the main question. Why do we praise God when we are going through terrible times?
 - i) Part of it is to keep our focus in perspective. We are going to live *forever*.
 - ii) Stop and think about how long "forever" is, compared to your lifetime!
 - iii) God has redeemed us so that we can spend eternity with him.
 - a) Out of *gratitude*, we live in obedience to what *He* has called us to do.
 - b) Out of *gratitude*, we live as *His* witnesses of our lives to others.
 - c) In the perspective of "forever," the suffering we go through now is meaningless in comparison. Whatever we do go through, God is working out for *His* glory.
 - d) Paul said, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18 NIV)
2. The reason I bring all this up is *that* is one of the main points of Daniel Chapter 3.
 - a) In this chapter, Daniel's three friends are tossed into a fiery furnace because they refused to obey the king's order to worship a false god. God himself rescues these three men from the furnace in a dramatic fashion. Then they all live "happily every after". ☺ It is a story many children know from Sunday school. This story has been an inspiration to Jews and Christians for centuries, on taking a stand for God no matter what the circumstances.
 - b) The great lesson is that God is *able* to rescue them, but God does not *have* to rescue them. We praise God, anyway, because we have the eternal perspective in mind.

3. Before I tackle Verse 1, I want to mention the "danger of familiarity."
 - a) When we know a story or section of the Bible well, we may tend to skim over it or think, I already know this stuff, why should I read further? I find that it is *impossible* to exhaust the learning one can get from the Bible. These studies are *not* designed to be a complete list of all one can learn from the Bible. No book in the world can do that. At the end of the Gospel of John, John himself adds an interesting commentary:
 - b) "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen." (John 21:25 NKJV)
 - i) To me, this verse is not *only* saying that one cannot write a complete description of every moment-by-moment event of Jesus' life on earth, but that if it were possible, the commentaries would go on and on forever. That's the point. The Bible is inexhaustible in its application to your life and mine.
 - c) Back in the first lesson of Daniel, I discussed how the book of Daniel is roughly half-narrative and half-prophetic. Most people love one of those two aspects of Daniel (either the narrative parts or the prophetic parts). What most people *miss* is the importance of *how they go together*.
 - i) Daniel was privileged with receiving some of the greatest prophecies in history. Those prophetic lessons, which have a dramatic impact on our lives today, as well as on Daniel's, were given as a *reward* for Daniel's obedience.
 - ii) For those of you who don't care much for prophecy, you might be thinking "Gee, *that's* a reward for obedience?" It may help if you look at it as not so much having a prediction of the future, but as having *insight*. Sometimes what we want from God more than anything else is *insight*. We want understanding of our lives, our purpose for living, and the reason God is allowing us to go through a particular trial. *These* prophecies were the *insights* given to Daniel. More on that as we approach the later parts of Daniel.
4. One last thing, and then we'll get rolling. You'll notice there is something missing in this chapter: Daniel himself.
 - a) This is the Book of Daniel. Daniel wrote it. Yet Daniel does not mention himself *anywhere* in this chapter. There is no "while I, Daniel, was off on a road trip, here is what was happening to my three close buddies..." ☺
 - b) This chapter includes one of the great miracles of Daniel. The fact that Daniel takes no credit for the miracle, no credit for the inspiration for the miracle, no credit, even, for being an influence on his three friends, says a lot about the character of Daniel.
 - i) One of the big themes to pick up on in the narrative aspects of Daniel is how much he stood up for "what is right" when nobody else does. The Book of Daniel is full of stories of *how to be a great witness for God*.
 - ii) I think Daniel wrote this chapter with pride. Not the self-pride of "look at me," but with the pride of "look at what God can do in the worst of circumstances."
 - iii) I see Daniel as a humble man who served his God, and was willing to give others the glory beside himself, which included his three friends.
 - iv) You may have noticed, by now, that I've been referring to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as "Daniel's three friends," because it is much easier on my typing fingers, as well as having to attempt to pronounce them when I'm teaching from these notes. ☺
5. Daniel Chapter 3, Verse 1: King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

- a) This is one of those cases where I prefer a more literal translation like the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible or the New American Standard Bible (NASB) over the New International Version (NIV) that I use here.
 - i) A more literal translation states that King Nebuchadnezzar's statue was 60 cubits high by 6 cubits wide. A cubit is a standard of measure that is roughly 18 inches. Different societies of that day had different "cubit" specifications, but that's a whole other trivial discussion.
 - ii) The reason I wanted to point that out is, in Babylonian society, the numbering system was "six-based" (1-6, then go to 2 digits) as opposed to our society, which is a "ten-based" system (0-9, then go to 2 digits).
 - a) Therefore, a statute "sixty cubits high" is as logical as us making a statue 100 feet high by 10 feet wide.
 - iii) Some see Nebuchadnezzar as a "type" of anti-Christ because the statue was 60 cubits high by 6 cubits wide and worshiped by the playing of six types of instruments, and thus, "666."
 - a) My personal view is, this is a stretch. While there are many lessons on Nebuchadnezzar and the worship of false gods, I don't see this, and I think it this is taking the text out of context to make it fit the picture. Others don't. So be it.
- b) The NIV is not wrong in its translation, as much as it is paraphrasing. A cubit is roughly 1.5 feet. Therefore, 60 cubits is about 90 feet.
 - i) On a side note, I don't have a favorite translation. I am very familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the major current English translations. I use the NIV simply because it is the most popular at the current time. The job of any good Bible teacher is to show how the Bible is relevant to your life and mine.
- c) Meanwhile, back at the statue. King Nebuchadnezzar made this 90-foot high gold statue. Most commentators believe it was gold-plated, as not that much gold existed in that location at that time. (Reaction: "whatever." ☺)
 - i) I want you to visualize a large valley. If you stand on a hill on the edge of that valley, usually you can see across the entire basin. Where I live, most structures are only two stories. Other than a few sections of high-rises, we live low to the ground. I sort of envision the capital of Babylon to be the same way. It was a large city of one and some two-story structures. The city walls were higher.
 - a) Now picture a nine-story high statue being erected. You could see it for miles. With gold covering, and the sun hitting it, it must have been a majestic sight. I'm sure it became the defining symbol of the City.
- d) Okay, on to the big question. Why did he build this thing in the first place?
 - i) Most commentators believe it represented Nebuchadnezzar's god, "Nebu." Remember that Nebuchadnezzar's name means "Nebu protects the crown."
 - ii) Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the world. He had all the power. I suspect he was giving credit to the god he was named after, for getting him to that position. I also read how there was a major uprising against Nebuchadnezzar a few years prior to this, so he might have also built it as a test of loyalty to his government. Just a theory, but it fits the story.
 - iii) In the last chapter, Daniel interpreted the dream of a large statue whose head was of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. Part of the dream interpretation was that Nebuchadnezzar himself was the head of gold.

- a) Nebuchadnezzar rewarded Daniel for correctly reading his mind, and interpreting the dream. The part I'm sure Nebuchadnezzar remembered the best was the part about himself being represented as the head of gold.
 - b) When you hear a speech, and your name is mentioned, what part do *you* remember the most? I'm sure this went to his head.
 - iv) Did the statue represent himself or his god? The answer is both.
 - a) The king knew he was named after his god. I'm sure he gave his god credit for his rise to power. But it also went to his head. He remembered Daniel's dream. Only now, instead of just the head being of gold, the whole statue was of gold. This is about building one's ego, pure and simple, whether you call it "your god" or yourself is irrelevant. It is one in the same.
 - v) Better move on to Verse 2 or I'll never get through this. ☺
- 6. Verse 2: He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.
 - a) I could go on for a half a page and explain what each of these groups mean, but let me put it to you this way: These are all the groups of people that were *on the government payroll*. They include judicial, administrative, military, consultants, etc.
 - i) Remember that Daniel himself was promoted, in Chapter 2, to be one of the top people (if not "the" top person) under Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, Daniel was familiar with all the different roles of the Babylonian government and their functions.
- 7. Verse 3: So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.
 - a) You can almost hear the gushing compliments of all these people, who were dependent upon the success of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian government: "Oh, your highness, it is a beautiful statue! We are so glad you called us out to see this. In all my life, I've never seen such a glorious thing! You are most amazing, your highness. Long live King Nebby...." This is how I envision the dedication ceremony.
- 8. Verse 4: Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."
 - a) Now *there's* an incentive plan! ☺
 - i) King Nebuchadnezzar made this proclamation via someone with a loud voice, a "herald." To paraphrase, "Okay, everybody, when the music starts, it's time for everybody bow down and worship the statue. Failure to obey means getting tossed alive into the fire. Any questions? Too bad, I won't answer them. Let's begin."
 - ii) Some translations call "pipes" bagpipes. One commentator mentioned that the sound of bagpipes is a threat, and not an incentive to bow. ☺
 - b) I was trying to visualize what this must have been like.
 - i) Here were all the people on the government payroll, from all areas of service. I suspect this was *every* leader, sub-leader, and influential person in the Babylonian Empire.

- a) These people had control over all of the "common" people, which probably meant slaves.
 - b) They either ordered all the slaves to comply as well, or this verse only applies to anybody who has some sort of power.
 - c) All of a sudden, this music starts. Okay, everybody, we don't want to make the king mad...after all, our lives are at stake, not to mention our power, prestige, and source of income. What harm can it do anyway? It only costs us a few minutes of our time and it shows the king our loyalty.
- c) I was also thinking about this from King Nebuchadnezzar's perspective.
 - i) Maybe he did it out of ego. He wanted to honor the god who he believed raised him to power. It was an extension of honoring himself.
 - ii) I suspect, but can't prove, he may have also done this to check the loyalty of the people. (Again there was a major rebellion against him prior to this event!)
 - a) He remembered that Daniel's dream stated that "one day" his kingdom would be taken over by the "silver kingdom," as described in Chapter 2.
 - b) Therefore, King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to keep an eye on possible traitors. What better way to keep an eye on people than to have *everybody* of any significance bow down and worship his statue?
 - c) To me, that explanation makes more sense than any other.
- d) One obscure detail that caught my eye is that the list of musical instruments is mentioned three times. In verses 5, 10, and 15 of this chapter, the list of the six types of musical instruments are listed along with the comment of "all kinds of music."
 - i) I suspect there was a full orchestra led by these six instruments.
 - ii) I was thinking about the concept of "music" and its affect upon people.
 - iii) Universally, music is known and loved by all people.
 - a) We each prefer different styles, mostly based on our upbringing.
 - b) Music, as an art form, "moves us" internally more, collectively, than any other art form.
 - c) Music, in itself, is neither a good nor bad thing. But because it has the power to "move" (or sooth) people, it can be used for and/or associated with all sorts of good and evil intentions.
 - (1) Some people see music as a solution to world peace. Because music soothes people, they see it as the universal language.
 - (2) Music does stir our emotions, but not our permanent behavior. I remember reading about workers at the Nazi holocaust camps who were moved to tears by a Beethoven concert, but were "back to work" the next day.
 - iv) I suspect the music itself was beautiful to listen to. It was probably soothing.
 - v) What King Nebuchadnezzar was doing was creating *association*.
 - a) Most Americans know the game of "word association." I say a word, and you say the first thing that pops into your head.
 - (1) We often hear a common name, and associate it with a friend. We hear a cliché, and remember the movie in which we first heard that cliché.
 - (2) The same applies to music. We hear a musical reference, and it can remind us of some happy memory of our past, or the lyrics come to mind, or a dance step, or some other association.

- b) King Nebuchadnezzar was doing the same thing. I suspect he created an original melody. He wanted people to associate that melody with bowing down and worshipping him!
 - c) Can't you see the average Babylonian person reacting to this? "Oh, honey, hang on a minute, the music is starting. Let me bow down for a minute toward that statue, and then I'll be with you in second!"
 - (1) Now stop and think of the things you might be doing/have done that are not pleasing to God "out of reflex" like the music!
 - (2) That's my point. One of the ways we turn away from God is by subconscious association. We associate "this" with "that." Often, it is harmless. Often, it could be something that is not pleasing to God. My point is to be careful of such associations.
- 9. Verse 7: Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.
 - a) There they go. It's music time. Time to hit the floor.
 - b) You can almost hear Christians "rationalizing" why it's okay to do this:
 - i) "Well, God understands my heart"; "It's no big deal anyway"; "I really believe in God and go to church on Sunday"; "I'm just doing what I'm required to do to keep my job"; "After all, if I die, I can't glorify God"; "If I die, I can't support the wife and kids"; "I can always confess the sin right afterwards, anyway"; "Therefore, God knows my heart, and he'll understand."
 - ii) Let me summarize this, from a biblical expression, in one word. NO!!!!!!
 - c) There is one significant problem; just a little something from the Ten Commandments!
 - i) "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. *You shall not bow down to them or worship them,*" [emphasis added] (Exodus 20:5 NIV)
 - ii) God commands us to obey all authorities appointed by man. (Romans 13:1). However, there are exceptions, when we are called to the "higher authority." When a government gives an order that is in direct violation of what God commands us to do, God is the "higher authority." There are a few good biblical examples:
 - a) In Egypt, Pharaoh ordered the execution of all male babies of the Hebrew Children. The Hebrew midwives disobeyed a direct order, as they knew it was wrong. (Exodus Chapter 1)
 - b) Peter and John continued to preach the Gospel in Jerusalem despite a direct order from the Jewish authority not to preach Jesus. (Acts 5:29)
 - c) Please understand, disobeying authority comes with a price. It could cost you your life, or time in jail, as it does Christians today, in countries like China, for daring to preach the Bible.
 - d) These are situations to pray about carefully. There are times when God calls you to take a stand for him, and often at a major cost to your life.
 - iii) This also comes back to the issue of "Christians and the Ten Commandments."
 - a) Are Christians *required* to keep the Ten Commandments?
 - b) Christians vary in their explanation of this. I take the view that our salvation comes from Jesus *alone*, and we can't do anything to add to that. Out of *gratitude* for what Jesus did for us, we *should* be obedient of what God calls us to do.

- c) Further, I look at the Ten Commandments as a model for happiness. These Ten Commandments are a model for our lives on how to live a happy and joyous life, full of fulfillment.
 - d) King Solomon, at the end of his life, also came to this conclusion. He had "done it all" and had a lifelong search for fulfillment by trying everything one can imagine. Here is his conclusion:
 - (1) "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the *whole* duty of man." [emphasis added] (Ecclesiastes 12:13b NIV)
 - d) Which leads us back to the verse (I'd knew I'd get there eventually ☺). If we were in Babylon, as Christians, should we *not* bow down and be burned in the fire?
 - i) Absolutely. It isn't about being "under" the Ten Commandments, it is about taking a stand for God!
 - a) That is what God calls us to today, as well.
 - ii) Live your life in a way that people *know* you are taking a stand for God.
 - iii) Also, avoid "extremes." Nobody likes an obnoxious person, no matter what issue or religion he is peddling. The other extreme is to live a Christian life so secretly that not even your neighbor knows you believe. Being a Christian requires a balance. The balance of being a good witness.
 - a) "I don't mind Christians telling me about Jesus. I have a problem when they are obnoxious about it." Dennis Prager, (Jewish) radio host.
10. Verse 8: At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews.
- a) The next three verses tell the story of some Babylonian astrologers. I suspect these guys were high-ranking Babylonian officials, but a few notches of power lower than Daniel's three friends. The business cliché of "backstabbing" comes to mind here.
 - b) These astrologers notice Daniel's three friends don't bow down to the image. Here's their chance to eliminate them and move up a notch in power.
 - c) This verse is a reminder of what to expect when you take a stand for God.
 - i) The people of the world are *not* going to pat you on the back and commend you for not bowing down to their gods or for abstaining from the things they enjoy. They're not going to be proud of you for not going out partying and getting drunk with them. No!
 - ii) This is a big "part" of spiritual warfare. God designed us with instinctive knowledge to worship Him and Him alone. When we turn away from the true and living God, we want to drag others down to our level with us. That way we feel less guilty about whatever sin we are committing.
 - a) Listen to Solomon's advice: "my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood. (Proverb 1:15-16 NIV)
 - d) Before I get into the specifics, notice Verse 8 specifically says they "denounced the Jews." This verse gives the perspective that it wasn't just Daniel's three friends who wouldn't bow down, but "Jews," in general.
 - i) One of Satan's main objectives is to stop God's redemptive plan for mankind. God, at this time, is working through the nation of Israel. The messiah came through the nation of Israel. If Satan could successfully wipe out the nation, as a whole, he would stop God's plan. Thus, the anti-Jewish bigotry.
 - ii) I take the view that God is *still* not finished with the nation of Israel, corporately. This is the evil spiritual aspect of why anti-Semitism (a.k.a. anti-Jewish) bigotry still exists today. That is a lecture all unto itself.

11. Verse 9: They (the astrologers) said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."
 - a) You can almost see these three guys "buttering up" the king. They give the old "live forever" greeting. They repeat back the king's orders and all the specifics. Then they say, "Oh by the way, you know those three Jews who you put in charge of Babylon, well, we just *happened* to notice they're not bowing down. What do you think about that, your highness, sir?"
 - b) Notice that Daniel's three friends (okay, I'll write it out: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ☺) were "over the affairs of the province of Babylon." That meant that the king's astrologers were under them in political power.
 - i) Unfortunately, this type of story happens *every day* in corporations and government structures around the world. People lust for power, and many don't think twice about doing things like this to rise in power.
12. Verse 13: Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"
 - a) Because Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were high-ranking officials, they were given "another chance." Let me see if I can paraphrase King Nebuchadnezzar for you: "All right, you three. I placed you in power out of gratitude to Daniel for his "dream-interpretation thing" (Chapter 2). I got to admit you've done an outstanding job as top administrators. But the law is the law, no exceptions, no matter how high up you rank. Personally, I don't care where you're from or what your customs are, but around here, we worship Nebu. When you hear the music, you bow down. Period. What kind of example would it be if my three top guys refuse to bow down, without consequence?"
 - b) Notice Nebuchadnezzar's question at the end of Verse 15: "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" If *that* isn't an opportunity to tell someone about the true and living God, I don't know what is!
 - i) From man's perspective, Nebuchadnezzar's question/statement is true. There is no (other) god that can rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
 - ii) This is a good verse to remember in times when things seem hopeless. I am convinced God *loves* opportunities like this. Because it gives God an opportunity to show us his love, his glory, and his power. When there is *no other alternative* is when God does his best work for those who are willing to turn to him.
 - iii) The sad thing about *believing Christians* is we tend to try all our human resources and abilities *first* before we place our full trust in God. God is often patient with us as we exhaust our own futile abilities to solve a problem. Life would be so much less stressful for us *if* we would only turn to God first.
13. Verse 16: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing

furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.

- a) Now *there* is the proper response and attitude towards God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego state that they *don't* need to defend themselves, because God does that for us!
 - i) "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, *because You defend them*; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You." [emphasis added] (Psalm 5:11 NKJV)
- b) The key to these two verses is the word "able" in Verse 17. God is *able* to rescue us from the furnace. God is *able* to rescue us out of whatever problem, situation, pain, stress, and burden we find ourselves in.
 - i) If you *don't believe* God can rescue you out of whatever mess you find yourself in, consider the fact that your concept of God is too small!
 - a) There is a *reason* that the first sentence of the Bible states, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." A God who created *everything* is a God *capable* of fixing, solving, relieving, and recovering, for us, whatever issues we're dealing with.

14. My favorite verse in the Chapter. (Yes, that means pay attention ☺) Verse 18: But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

- a) The first three words, in the King James version, is "*But if not*." Even the NIV study Bibles that use italics for emphasis read "*But even if he does not*." In the Hebrew, "but if not" is all one word with an emphasis on the negative.
- b) I'm getting picky here on the word usage, because "*But if not*" is a special three-word usage to me, and to all Christians. It is about *surrendering your life totally to God*.
- c) Let me paraphrase what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saying: "Oh yes, your highness, our God is more than able to rescue us if He feels like it. That would be no problem for our God. In fact, He delights in situations like these. But even if he doesn't, we are still going to worship him, and him alone, no matter what."
- d) Why do we do that? When God *doesn't* rescue us, why do we still worship him and serve him? Come on, shouldn't we be mad at him for not rescuing us?
 - i) Remember our purpose in life. *We are here to do God's will*. Period.
 - ii) Humanity is a lifelong struggle between God's will and man's will. God wants the best for us. We often don't understand why God allows us to go through things. We don't understand the pain. All we do know is "the alternative is worse." It is *still* better to serve God than any other possible alternative.
 - iii) One *has* to remember the eternal perspective. We are going to live forever. We are here as God's witnesses, to help people understand that it is only through Jesus that, *not only* do we have eternal life, but that our life here on earth *begins* once we have that understanding. Again, period!
 - iv) *That* is why Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego can stand up to the most powerful king in the world and say, "but if not."
 - v) That phrase has been an inspiration to Jews and Christians for centuries. One of my favorite stories is during WWII, off the coast of England, where several men were in grave danger and about to lose their lives. Their radio battery was about to die. The only words they got out over the radio, in their plea for help, were, "but if not." To make a long story short, they were rescued out of an impossible situation.

15. Verse 19: Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual.
- a) As I stated earlier, don't expect the world to be impressed with our stand for God. When someone has a rebellious heart toward God, they are going to feel guilty. To see someone take a stand for God will often cause a violent reaction against you.
 - b) Personally, I find some humor in the line "make the furnace seven times hotter," as if that would convince Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to change their minds. "Gee, we might survive a burning furnace, but now that it's seven times hotter, maybe we should change our mind"? ☺
 - c) Personally, I see Nebuchadnezzar as having a flair for the "melodramatic." He is the kind of guy who tends to "blow everything out of proportion." Back in Chapter 2, when he wanted his dream interpreted, he told them if they failed he would have them "cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble." If you read back over the past three chapters of whenever Nebuchadnezzar makes a proclamation, you can't help but chuckle at his flair for the dramatic.
16. Verse 20: and (Nebuchadnezzar) commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.
- a) Nebuchadnezzar expected Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to resist being thrown into the fire. Therefore, the "strongest" soldiers were brought in.
17. Verse 21: So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.
- a) The soldiers were burned throwing these three men into the fire.
 - i) God allowed the soldiers to die in the fire to emphasize the magnitude of the miracle of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego surviving it.
 - ii) Somebody might ask, "Why did the soldiers die? They were just obeying orders." The answer is to think about the big perspective. God will judge all people fairly one day. God *allowed* them to die in the fire to show the enormity of God's power in rescuing Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God often allows the innocent to suffer in order for God's *greater* purposes to work themselves out.
18. Verse 24: Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, O king." ²⁵ He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."
- a) I personally take the view that the fourth person Nebuchadnezzar saw in the fire was none other than a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus himself. Nebuchadnezzar didn't know what to call this person, so Nebuchadnezzar said he "looks like a son of the gods." Whether it was Jesus or an angel, we don't know for sure.
 - i) During the roughest moments of *our* lives, Jesus is there *with us*, in "our" fires.
 - b) I like the fact that the verse mentions they were *walking around* in the fire. Some critics might argue that there was a "cool spot" in the middle of the furnace. Well, so much for that argument.
 - c) Nebuchadnezzar noticed the fact they were walking around *unbound*, as well as unharmed. So much for them being "firmly tied" by the "strongest soldiers."
19. Verse 26: Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,

- a) Of all the verses in Daniel, this is the one I have the toughest time with. Personally, if I was in a blazing fire *with Jesus*, or even with an angel, anyone would have a tough time talking me out of there, because I would be too busy either worshipping Him or just asking questions! ☺
 - b) Notice they didn't come out *until* the king gave a command for them to come out.
 - c) God still calls us to obey governing authorities (see Romans 13:1) *unless* there are situations like this, where God is specifically calling us to take a stand for him against such authorities.
20. Verse 27: and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.
- a) This is what God wants of us. To be his witnesses to the world. *This* is why God rescued them from the furnace. Not because they were good people. Not because they were better people than anybody else in Babylon. It was because they *trusted* in the true and living God by surrendering the situation completely to God, and gave God an opportunity to show His glory to the world around them.
 - b) Notice they were unbound without even the *smell* of fire upon them.
 - i) When you are willing to take a stand for God, God even separates the *smell* of the world from you!
21. Verse 28: Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." ³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.
- a) If you recall, I mentioned that King Nebuchadnezzar had a flair for the melodramatic. Here was a guy who was saying, just ten minutes ago (more or less!), that "whoever does not fall down and worship" his statue would die. Now it was "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego," and gave another of his "cut into pieces" and "houses turned into rubble" speeches.
 - b) I like to call these three verses, "King Nebuchadnezzar gets religious," but I *don't* believe King Nebuchadnezzar was saved here. I believed Nebuchadnezzar *still* believed in many gods. Let me paraphrase: "Hey, you three, what your god did was very impressive. That was a nice trick. He saved you from a hot fire. I've never seen my god(s) do that one. Therefore, we should respect your god, as well as all the others".
 - c) What you are reading here is King Nebuchadnezzar asking for *compromise*. He was saying, "Hey everybody, let's worship the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego because they have a powerful god who can save people out of fires. You can still do whatever you want when you're *not* worshipping the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but don't forget *their* God, because this guy is powerful!"
 - d) *This* is how many view Christianity. The idea of compromise. They acknowledge that the Christian God is a "powerful god" and that we should acknowledge him every Sunday morning. The rest of the week we can honor other gods, as well. Let's just not forget the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and attend church *every* Sunday!
22. One of the great big-picture lessons of the Book of Daniel is "taking a stand for God." In this chapter, the focus is on God showing off his power when Daniel's three friends completely turn the situation over to God.

- a) God *delights* in working in impossible situations. I have found God works best in situations where there is no other alternative. I have also found he works *faster* in Christian lives when we *completely* surrender the situation over to him.
- b) The "enemy," which in this chapter is Nebuchadnezzar as a "word picture," shows how the world compromises with the true and living God.
 - i) First they try to get us to completely stop worshiping our God (as was the fiery furnace); and later, they try compromise.
 - ii) Satan's strategy is always one of *compromise*. I take the view that as long as you are seeking God and putting your trust in Jesus, you can't lose your salvation. What Satan wants is for you to be a *bad witness* for Jesus. The way to make you a bad witness is to start compromising with what God has called you to do. *That* is what we see in this chapter. First, by making *everybody* bow down to a statue; second by the *threats*; and in the last few verses, saying for all to pay *some* homage to the true and living God.
- c) If you only remember three words from this chapter, memorize these: "but if not." That should be our view. as we are God's witnesses to an unbelieving and dying world.
 - i) God is *able* to save you from any problem, danger or situation.
 - ii) But God is not *obligated* to save you.
 - a) We worship him, not vice versa.
 - b) God is in charge, not us.
 - c) We worship God out of gratitude, for our eternal salvation.
 - d) We live as witnesses *for* him.
 - e) All things God puts us through is for our edification in order to serve him as a better witness to the world.

23. With that, let's pray: Father, there are times and days when we go through pains and sorrows that are unbearable. Please forgive us as we trust in our own resources and turn to you last. Forgive us for trusting in you *and other things*. We know that you are able to rescue us through any situation. We know that you *can* provide the means and the people to help us in whatever situation we find ourselves in. But if not, we will still worship you anyway. Because we know that you love us, have rescued us from this dying world, and your plans are greater than our plans. May we glorify you though *all* things. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.
