

We resume our study in Daniel chapter 3. Nebuchadnezzar, verse 19, was full of fury at the response of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to the accusation, which turns out to be true, that they do not worship the gods of Nebuchadnezzar, nor do they bow down before his image when the harp, and the horn, and the psaltery, and the flute, and the lyre, and all the rest of it, and symphony with all kinds of music—there's this great blaring cacophony that takes place.

I don't know who had to write the—speaking of cacophony—no, that's euphony, but the noise of the music. This reminds me of being on a military base, and in the morning when the colors go up, and in the evening when the colors come down, they used to do it with an actual bugler who would stand out in the middle of the compound and blow his horn. But now they had loudspeakers scattered throughout the base.

And so, and I've told you this before, but whenever I think of colors in the morning, and especially colors in the evening, in Okinawa at Camp Foster, they played both the American National Anthem when they raised the American flag, and they played the Japanese National Anthem when they raised the Japanese flag. And that Japanese anthem, that's enough to just make you want to go back to bed. It's so depressing.

If you ever hear the Japanese National Anthem, you just picture in your mind, you know, Zeros crashing into the ocean, and smoke rising from Hiroshima, and battleships sinking to the bottom of the South China Sea. It's just a dirge. It's a dirge. It's a sad, morose, uninspiring piece of music. It's just like, oh, what's the point?

But anyway, when they play the music, you're supposed to come to attention and salute. If you can't see the flagpole, you face the direction of wherever you think the flagpole is and, you know, hold your salute until you hear a carry on. Then you can get moving again.

Cars are supposed to stop, and so on. They don't do it near as much as they used to, but it used to be a big deal. Well, this goes way back to ancient times, and when you hear the blare of the music, all business and conversation halts, and everybody falls down.

It's like ashes, ashes, we all fall down. And so Nebuchadnezzar is quite upset to find out that these three recently promoted junior birdmen here, junior Chaldeans, junior government officials that he's just honored and raised up and made a big noise and created all of this stir about—headline news—now they're making headlines because they are seemingly full of impunity when it comes to the king's command. So naturally, Nebuchadnezzar is full of fury.

The expression on his face in verse 19 changed towards Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And you get the idea that even though he was angry before, he had on his sort of royal poker face because he's got dignity and he's got satraps and princes and officials and Chaldeans hanging around there, and he's trying to be regal and be noble and be beneficent.

Perhaps this was just some sort of mistake. It's come to my attention that maybe you Hebrews are a little rusty on your Aramaic or something. Maybe you didn't get the words. So if you fall down when you hear the sound of the music—but if not, I'm going to roast you in the furnace.

Well, when he hears their reply, “Let it be known to you, O king, we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship”—and this is just, you know, whippersnappers, you know, just stoke the fires. So he spoke and commanded to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

Now, usually heated makes me ask a question. Is this a usual furnace? I mean, is this something where a few people a day get tossed in for various infractions and crimes? Well, you know, we've got the furnace. We just tossed a guy in a couple of hours ago, but for you, we're going to stoke it and make it seven times hotter.

If the furnace is usually heated, that means there is usually fire in the furnace, and this does not bode well. You have to think that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are fully aware of the consequences. It was published, it's been broadcast, everybody knows that the furnace is burning, and I think it's there as sort of a deterrent.

You don't know if it's actually, you know, got the odd Babylonian being thrown in there every other hour or so. But certainly the thing is burning, and the distortion in the atmosphere of the heat, you know, people look at it and it's boiling hot.

Well, perhaps this is the furnace in which they melted the gold that was used to coat this statue. It's 90 feet tall, it's 9 feet wide, it's a huge thing, and they had to melt untold ounces of gold to cover this thing. And so they would have had a furnace there to make the gold pliable and so on.

And so maybe Nebuchadnezzar, as the thing was nearing completion, he's walking around and he said, "Boy, this is great. Oh boy, that furnace is hot. Let's go stand somewhere else." Well, if anybody hadn't bowed down to this thing, let's just throw them in there. It's convenient. It's right next to the statue, and everybody that's supposed to be worshiping the statue will see the punishment for failing to fall down in front of it.

And so, if I had to guess, I would say this was originally the furnace where they would stick long-handled pots in there from a safe distance and get the gold to its melting point so that they can pour it out flat and then hammer it and do all the stuff that they're trying to do. Mold the nose and the ears and things that are going to be up there and some parts that might be solid.

So, he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. So these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments.

Why? Why didn't they strip them down to their loincloth or something and then toss them in? Combustibles. Combustibles. Wrap them in combustibles. If they've rubbed some kind of grease on them, well, wrap them up in their clothes and turn them into little flaming torches. So they're wrapped up in their clothing because everybody knows this clothing is going to catch and burn, and that will be the means of their destruction.

They were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent—and this is an understatement—because the king's command was so intense, because it was so strident, because it was so filled with fury and anger, the furnace was exceedingly hot.

Everybody says, "The king is mad. This is not the time to make him think you haven't obeyed." So everybody says he wants it seven times hotter. How can you tell? What kind of furnace thermometer do they have in 600 B.C. to say, "Well, it was 215 degrees and now it's 1,500 degrees"? How can you know that? They just made it as hot as they possibly could. There's no doubt in anybody's mind that that's just about the hottest furnace anybody's ever seen.

Well, you can imagine the mighty men of valor getting picked out and saying, "Okay, Brutus, you, you, and you, come over here. Bind these three guys all up, wrap them up in their clothes, make them nice and ignitable, wrap them in the tinder."

Well, as they start approaching the furnace, you know what this is like. If you've ever burned a brush pile or burned an old tire or gotten close to a big flame, been at a high school bonfire or something—our school was too small to have a bonfire—but you get close to a big fire like that, you feel the heat. You get close to your fireplace and you feel the heat when there's a hot fire in there.

So how do you think these men got close enough to cast the three individuals in? Well, they used them as shields. Once they got close and started getting hot, these guys know how to use a shield. They're mighty men of valor. You've got something attacking you from the front, you put a shield in front. So they just grab these guys by the ropes and use them like a shield. And they walk them up and hide in the shadows, so to speak, of these three individuals.

And they say, "Well, I sure hope this guy doesn't drop before I get close enough to throw him in." Then when they get near enough to the furnace to push them on in, as soon as they push them in, there's no more shield. And the wave of heat hits them and kills them just virtually instantly. They're not even in the furnace. They're just near the furnace. And the heat blast of the furnace kills them instantly as they push the three individuals in, who did not die and evidently felt no discomfort during the approach.

Well, this, of course, is a supernatural work of God. And even as people watched them getting close, they had to say, "What are these guys made of that the mighty men of valor are having to hide behind these little skinny teenagers, and big mighty men of valor are trying to hide behind these little guys?" They might have outweighed them two for one in terms of pounds. And their shoulders are getting singed and their uniforms are starting to

smoke. Their feet are getting hot. Their toes are getting roasted. And they're just thinking, "Oh man, send me to the front. Send me to the Russian front. Send me anywhere except up into this furnace."

Well, of course, they get killed. So the flame of fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and—how many times is it going to tell us their names?—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. It just repeats them over and over, just like we saw all through this chapter. These three men fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose in haste. Now, if he rose in haste, what does that mean? He was sitting down. He had them roll out the portable throne to the area where the furnace is, which is near the image. And it's a spectacle. It's an entertainment event.

Now, your run-of-the-mill petty thief or whoever that gets punishment, the king doesn't come out for that. They've probably tossed who knows how many other people into this furnace who were deaf or crazy or couldn't tell the difference between music and other loud noises and they got thrown in there. But the king comes out and sits down, and he's going to watch this event from a safe distance.

And so he's looking through the heat wave shimmering out of the mouth of this furnace, and he watches the guys go forward and he sees his soldiers fall down dead. And so he's peering in, and you've got this distortion. You know what it's like looking at something that's really hot, looking at the back of a jet engine. And it's just all wavy and distorted.

And so he's peering through there because he can't quite tell what he's seeing and he's a fair distance away. But he is astonished and he stands up. He rose in haste, and he speaks and he says to his counselors—these are the other Chaldeans—he says, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king, that's what we did."

"Look," he answered, "I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

Well, we have to take just a little bit of time to look at the language here, because when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, or Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, speak to the king, they talk about God, don't they? Nebuchadnezzar asks them a question back in verse 14 and he says, "Is it true that you do not serve my gods?" Is it true that you do not serve my gods?

And the word here is the Aramaic form of Elohim. It's a common masculine plural with the suffix that means my. It's got like the Y on the end, and it's Elahi. In Aramaic it's Elah instead of Elo, but it's close. They're cognate languages. So he says, "Is it true that you do not serve my Elahi, my gods?" Plural.

Of course, they answer in verse 15, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter if it is the case," or "if that our God whom we serve is able to deliver us." And at the beginning of verse 17 here, the word that they use to refer to God is Elahana, which in Hebrew would be Elohenu. You may have heard that before: Yahweh Elohenu, the Lord our God.

Well, this is Elahana. It's Aramaic, but it's the same idea. And this is the masculine singular, our God singular. When Nebuchadnezzar talks about my gods, it's plural. When they say our God, it's singular.

And when Nebuchadnezzar asks them the question and says, "If not, I will cast you into the midst of the burning fire of your furnace. And who is the God who will deliver you from my hands?" At the end of verse 15, he uses the form of Eloha that is singular. This stands to reason because he says, "Who is the God?" Elah. Here it's E-L-A-H.

So when he stands up and looks into the furnace and says, "I see a fourth man, and he is like"—in your King James it says "the Son of God"—which form did he use, singular or plural? He knows how to use the singular to talk about a God, to talk about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They use the singular when they talk about God.

So which form is it here at the end of verse 25? It is the plural. It is the plural. And the definite article is not there. "The form of the fourth is like a son of the gods" is the correct translation here. The form of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

And this is what you would expect Nebuchadnezzar to say. Nobody knows anything about a Son of God in the sense of the Hebrew God. And this is a later understanding working its way into the translation on the part of the King James and New King James translators.

The form of the fourth is like a son of the gods. Now, who is standing in the furnace with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah? All we know is the description from the lips of Nebuchadnezzar that he looks divine. He looks like a son of the gods. Is it the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it an angel? I can't tell you. The passage doesn't tell us.

What do we know from Scripture, however? Isn't it interesting that after looking at passages such as the one I read to you earlier from Leviticus about the restriction on priests, and what you find in Deuteronomy, talking about whether or not you can approach to worship, the restrictions on eunuchs—and these three young men are eunuchs—are that they can't approach the holy precincts of God as priests.

Furthermore, Deuteronomy 23, verse 1: “He who is emasculated by crushing or by mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.” Now, this is no longer talking about priests. This is talking about general run-of-the-mill Israelites. He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation. These three individuals have been emasculated by mutilation. That's what being made a eunuch is.

“He who is emasculated by crushing or mutilation shall not enter the assembly of the Lord.” They're lumped in with one of illegitimate birth who does not enter the assembly of the Lord, even of the tenth generation. An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the Lord. Eunuchs, whether by accident or design, are forbidden. They're lumped in with Ammonites, Moabites, those of illegitimate birth.

And yet, there is a divine presence or a divinely initiated presence of some sort. Is it the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ? Is it an angel? I lean strongly toward an angel. All the other visitations in the book of Daniel are angelic. Every time Daniel's talking to someone, it's an angel. Is it Gabriel? Is it Michael? Is it some other messenger angel sent to comfort and encourage and demonstrate divine favor? Someone to stand with them in their hour of trial?

It is from God. That much is clear. Certainly not a Babylonian or Chaldean standing in there. And it's not any human being. There is a supernatural act of God in progress as they stand in the midst of this intense heat and are unharmed.

And what does it tell us? It tells us that the passage we read earlier out of Isaiah chapter 56 is in the process of being fulfilled, at least in shadow form. What did he say in Isaiah chapter 56? He says, “The eunuch shall not say, ‘Here I am, a dry tree.’” What's the problem with a dry tree when it gets close to fire? Burns up, just like a man wrapped in his clothes ought to burn up in a hot fire.

But the eunuch doesn't have to say, “Well, here I am, a dry tree. Not only am I fruitless, but I'm combustible.” “Thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths and choose what pleases me and hold fast my covenant.” Is that what these three men have done? “Even to them I will give in my house and within my walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters.”

Now, the sons and the daughters occupy the next two courts in the temple. The outermost court, the court of the Gentiles. Then you have the court of the women, the daughters. Then you have the court of the men, the sons. Then you have the court of the priests. What's better than the court of the women and the court of the men? The court of the priests.

Where are eunuchs specifically forbidden in two different ways from being anywhere near the court of the priests? In Leviticus and in Deuteronomy, it's specifically prohibited that they be anywhere near the place of worship. And yet God says, “I will give them a place in my house and within my walls, a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters.”

Why? What kind of eunuchs qualify for this honor and this reward? Those who keep my Sabbaths and choose what pleases me. What does it mean to keep the Sabbath? What's our understanding of the application of that for ourselves? We don't observe Saturday inactivity. We don't come to church on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath.

Why? How do we observe God's Sabbaths? Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work. On the seventh you rest and meditate on the work of God. For in six days God created the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh he rested.

We figure out the six parts of our existence that belong to us where we work and we labor and we fulfill our duties and our responsibilities. And we also identify that seventh part which we have to turn over to God, and we have to rest in his provision and we have to rest in his finished work. It is up to us to figure out where that Sabbath is.

You look at a situation and you say, "Well, should I just sit here and wait? I'm unemployed. Should I just sit here and wait for my phone to ring, or should I print up a few resumes? Should I knock on a few doors? Should I make a few phone calls? Should I go out and beat the streets and sign up here and there and do whatever?" How do you know how much you should do and where to leave off? This is observing God's Sabbath.

The Sabbath command in the Ten Commandments is a dual command. Six days shalt thou labor. We are commanded to work at the appropriate time, and we're commanded to rest at the appropriate time. All of the Ten Commandments still apply to us, every one of them, including remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

But for us, it's not a day of the week. For us, it is a time and a place and a situation and a circumstance. What is the meaning of that command, remember the Sabbath day? Remember that there is a part that is assigned to you where you are supposed to work, and there is a part that is left to God where you're supposed to stop and rest and meditate on his provision.

We don't look legalistically at a calendar to figure out when the Sabbath is. We analyze situations. We look at circumstances. We make application of the Word of God in our souls, and we figure out where we are supposed to work and where we are supposed to rest, and that is how we observe God's Sabbath.

Those eunuchs who keep my Sabbath and choose what pleases me and hold fast my covenant, even to them God says, "I will give this unique and special place an everlasting name that shall not be cut off." People think, "Well, I'll establish my name by having offspring." You know, you have sons, your name is carried forward.

I come from a long line of Hulls, each of whom had a Hull son. Somebody back in the 1500s was named Hull and had a son who was named Hull and had a son who was named Hull, and son, son, son, son, generation after generation all the way down. I don't happen to have any sons, and so my branch of the Hull tree, in terms of passing on a name, will end. Now, my brother's got a couple of sons, so there will be more Hulls going down the line, but they won't come from me.

Do I care? Not one whit. You know why? Because that's not the kind of name it's important to pass on. The kind of name that you want to pass on is this kind of name, an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. And whether you have any children or not, whether you have any legacy or not in the physical realm, is meaningless.

The rock is going to hit the feet, and all of human civilization is going to be swept away. It's going to be meaningless and unimportant. What's going to count? Those who stand with a name in the temple of God, in the millennial kingdom, and in the kingdom of the Father.

And you don't have to be a man to pass on that name. You can be a woman. You don't have to have offspring or progeny to pass on that name. All you have to do is be faithful to the covenant of God. All you have to do is choose what pleases God. All you have to do is observe his statutes in your life. And you are the heir and the recipient of that everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

That's ironic language, isn't it? Because a eunuch is someone who has had his ability to pass on a name cut off, literally. Literally cut off. God says, "You can accomplish something that cannot be cut off." They can wrap you in all the clothes. They can throw you into the hottest furnace there is. You cannot lose your everlasting name.

And God demonstrates it here by making these three individuals fireproof. Why are their names repeated so often in this chapter? Even their Babylonian names are repeated and repeated and repeated. Why? They have an imperishable name. They are specific individuals fulfilling this promise in Isaiah chapter 56. They are eunuchs who are faithful to the covenant, who observe God's statutes and choose what is pleasing in his sight. And they have everlasting names.

The Word of God liveth and abideth forever. They are never going to be out of sight. They are never going to be out of mind. Teenagers. Teenagers. Ripped from their homes. Emasculated. In the worst of all possible circumstances.

What did they do? They remained faithful to God. They didn't throw up their hands and say, "Look at the bad hand that I got dealt. Look at the awful set of circumstances that have fallen on me." They have the same attitude that Job had, who also has an imperishable and everlasting name. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

And they tell Nebuchadnezzar, "It doesn't matter. If he delivers us from the furnace, he will deliver us from your hand. If not, let it be known to you, O king, we do not serve your gods and we will not worship the gold image that you have set up."

We know that there is a better kingdom coming, and we will settle for our name in that kingdom. Any kind of a name we might have in your kingdom is meaningless. Strip us of our titles. Take away our government position over the province of Babylon. It doesn't matter.

They're looking ahead. They're looking for a city whose founder and builder is God. And in the center of that city is a temple. And in that temple, these eunuchs will stand. Acceptable and pleasing and stationed there forever by God himself.

Well, when Nebuchadnezzar looks into the fire and sees the fourth man, the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods. This is a preview of that acceptable proximity to God. Remember we talked about how the priest, if he's got some kind of a defect, can't approach the veil. He can't even get close to the presence of God.

Here is a divine presence in symbolic form, whether it is an angel or a pre-incarnate Christ. It doesn't actually matter, and that's why the Scripture doesn't tell us. It is a sign and a symbol of the divine presence in their midst. God himself has put a representative presence right next to, touching these eunuchs who are disqualified from worship in Israel.

By the way, it's a sign of the degradation and depravity in Israel that although many other nations had eunuchs in their governments, the government in Judah never did. The government in Israel never did until you get—you know the first time in Scripture where eunuchs are mentioned as a part of an Israelite government? Jeconiah.

In the days of Jeremiah is the first time you find eunuchs mentioned associated with the government of either the northern or the southern kingdom. It's in the days of Jeconiah. If you remember, it is a eunuch, it's an Ethiopian eunuch, who gets Jeremiah out of the pit. An Ethiopian eunuch rescues Jeremiah. He's the one that hears and he goes, and his name is recorded in Scripture as well. Isn't that something?

So Nebuchadnezzar went near, verse 26, the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying these immortal names—these are their Babylonian names, their heathen names, but they have become immortal names. God has taken that which was meant to glorify the earthly and the mundane and the false and the idolatrous and turned them into noble names and great names.

"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God," singular, "come out and come here." You notice here is not there either. It's just, "Come out, come." So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came from the midst of the fire.

And the satraps, administrators, governors, king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power. The hair of their head was not singed, nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.

What's the one thing that burned in the fire? What's the one thing associated with these men that burned up? The bonds, the ropes. It's the only thing that incinerated.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. And they have frustrated the king's word and yielded their bodies that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God."

You cannot find a more powerful testimony, you cannot find a greater expression of faith than these who put their lives on the line so they would not compromise, not rationalize obedience, doing what is pleasing in God's sight, choosing what he desires, respecting his covenant, observing his Sabbath. How did these men observe the Sabbath? They worshipped God and they worshipped no one else. They said, "I have no other gods before me."

Therefore Nebuchadnezzar says in verse 29, "I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego"—in much of the Bible you have God referred to as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and here you have the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—"anyone who speaks a word amiss shall be cut in pieces and their houses shall be made an ash heap."

This is one of Nebuchadnezzar's favorite fates. This is the one he promised back in the first chapter when he couldn't find anybody to explain the dream. Because there is no other God who can deliver like this. Actually, at the beginning of the second chapter he said that. There is no other God who can deliver like this.

Isn't it a shame that a heathen, Gentile, pagan king can recognize that God is uniquely able to deliver? And many of us who belong to God, who have been saved by grace, forget it and don't remember that he is the God of all comfort. He is the God of salvation. There is nothing too hard for him. He is all powerful.

Any circumstance we face is allowed by him. It is part of his design. It is part of his purpose. And we forget that if we need deliverance he is mighty to save. The Navy hymn: "Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arm hath bound the restless wave. He bids the mighty ocean deep its appointed limits keep."

God can control things that no human being can even think of controlling. God can, at his choosing and at his will, render fire impotent. And he can also bring his own fire that is an irresistible judgment.

So it is important for us to remember these three individuals. Twenty-six hundred years after the fact, a decision that these men made on a single day affects hundreds of thousands of people. It is a witness and a testimony to the faithfulness of God, to the power of God, to the importance of being obedient to God.

Do you think there is anything you and I can do in our earthly life, any achievement, any accomplishment, that is going to be remembered 2,600 years from today? There can be. It is our life of faith. It is our belief in God, in his goodness, in his faithfulness, in his desire to deliver us.

In many cases the deliverance we need is from ourselves. We need deliverance from our own nature. We need deliverance from our past. We need deliverance from our bad decisions. We need deliverance from things that have us in their grip. We are bound and we are being shoved toward the furnace.

And the question is, do we still trust God? Or do we say, "No, wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. Before we get too close to the furnace here, where is that image? Crank up that harp and horn and let me fall down. I can see I have obviously made a mistake here."

Or do we trust God? And we say, "Look, though he slay me, yet will I trust him. All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his promise."

Do you want an everlasting name? It doesn't matter what has happened to you in this life. It doesn't matter if somebody has mutilated you. God says, "I will stand with you in the fire. You will stand with me in the kingdom." That's the promise.

If we can just remember, if we can just make it real, day by day by day. Great tests, small tests, big problems, small problems. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him. He will direct your paths.

That's the one thing we have that no other religion, no other person, no other power on earth exists like that. God is with us. And if God be for us, who can be against us? The hottest furnace in the world cannot burn you up.

Well, let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the wonderful illustration and the timeless truths that are taught in this great episode based on the lives of these three faithful men. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts. Remind us that we serve the same living and powerful God.

We have even greater truth and even greater knowledge available to us than these men had. And we have the opportunity to express a like faith. We pray that the Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in our lives in the days ahead. And we ask it in his name. Amen.