

TRUSTING GOD IN TROUBLING TIMES

Daniel 3:1-30

So as Christians we find ourselves living in a world and culture that often perceives our light as darkness and is increasingly hostile toward what we believe.¹ How do we live in a culture where our beliefs are suppressed or even silenced? How do we engage it? That's sort of what we want to look at this morning as we turn to the book of Daniel chapter 3, revisiting our theme for 2022 of **"Trust more. Fear less."** I have to admit that Pastor Erwin Lutzer greatly influenced this message today because he took us to Daniel 3 at the Berean conference last month. As soon as Lutzer finished that session and we were putting our coats on, I told my wife that we will be back in Daniel very soon at Chadron Berean because the passage fits perfectly with our emphasis in 2022. Daniel and his friends prove to be great role models for us on how to trust God in troubling times.

Many of us are familiar with Daniel. Daniel and the Lion's Den or the Fiery Furnace are bedtime and story time classics for many of you, but many of you also had no idea that when we grew up you your culture would shift so drastically that you would be in similar shoes as them – moral and spiritual exiles in your own Babylon. Knowing the opposition coming, we should learn from them.

First, I have to remind us of the context: The northern 10 tribes of **Israel**, called Israel, have been exiled – ripped out of their homeland – and taken into **Assyria** for the rejection of God's Law and worshipping false gods. The southern 2 of tribes, called **Judah**, have been exiled as well and taken to **Babylon**, about 350 miles east of the Promised Land. Israel as a nation is no longer a **theocratical kingdom of God** on earth. She is under the power of and at the mercy of **Gentile kingdoms** which brings faith-conflict. Gentiles don't believe what the Jews believe so they find themselves under pressure to compromise their beliefs. This is why God raises up **Daniel**: through divine revelations given to Daniel, God is helping the Israelites and the whole world know that even though God's **theocratic, earthly kingdom is paused**, God still reigns through His **universal kingdom** in Heaven. Daniel 4:25-26 says Heaven rules over all human kingdoms.

Key Terms: Most High God (used 13 times) &
King and kingdom or related terms (226 times)

Daniel helps us understand God's kingdom and predictive prophecy related to it. Along with the OT prophets, he presents the hope that when Christ comes the 2nd time, the shekinah glory that departed the temple will one day return and Christ will establish His kingdom (Ezek. 44:4; Dan. 2:44-45; 7:13-14), crushing all Gentile kingdoms, but not before He is cut off and has nothing in His 1st coming (Dan. 9:27). For now, the despairing Jew and proud Gentile world need to understand the Most High God is still in control even though the theocratic kingdom is paused.

In **Daniel 1**, the four young Jewish men – **Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, & Azariah** – have been chosen out of "the cream of the crop" of Israel to serve in the Babylonian king's court. These are good-looking young men with wisdom and knowledge and King Nebuchadnezzar tries to change

their **identity** basically. They teach them Babylonian **literature** and **language** and they give them **new names** to reflect their Babylonian gods – **Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, & Abed-nego**. However, despite the attempts to reeducate them, they **make up their mind** to keep serving God (1:8). Other translations say he “*purposed in his heart*” to walk with God and not compromise. That’s what you have to do when you are in Babylon.

WHEN IN BABYLON: Decide to walk with God no matter what.

In **Daniel 2**, Daniel interprets a dream for Nebuchadnezzar. He sees in a dream a giant statue made up of four parts. Daniel reveals that his Babylonian kingdom is the head of gold. The rest are other kingdoms who come after it: Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and a revived Romish empire which awaits the Great Tribulation period when Satan, through the Anti-Christ heads up the final Gentile world power. The Rock that falls from Heaven to end Gentile dominance and establish God’s kingdom is Christ. For his interpretation in chapter 2, Daniel and his friends are promoted again.

“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. 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. 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. 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed: “To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, 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. 6 But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.” 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.

I. THE DECREE. (VV. 1-7)

Nebuchadnezzar builds this massive statue that is no doubt inspired by the dream in the previous chapter where he is described as the golden head of a statue. What Nebuchadnezzar is saying by making the statue **totally of gold** is that he wants his kingdom to last forever. He’s disregarding the other kingdoms prophesied to come after his. It’s very prideful. Many also suggest that at this time there was an attempted coup to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar and he’s testing allegiances.

This **statue** is 90 feet high, around 9 stories. It’s just a little shorter than the high rise at Chadron State College. It reminds me of the various statues going up in **21 major cities around the world** – called *The Giant* – a 10 story-high moving statue with LED skin that can make it look like anyone

they want. The idea is to highlight the “giants” in communities. Art like this is really humanism – glorification and deification of man. We live in the day of man where man thinks he is his own god and write his own rules. It’s not hard to imagine tyrants using this, like the future Anti-Christ. The reason we don’t have to imagine is because tyrants already do it: Mao and Lenin. They put up big statues of themselves. There’s nothing new here. Essentially, Nebuchadnezzar was seeking to weld all of the nations within his kingdom under one totalitarian government with one world religion. In the future, Anti-Christ will do the same thing. He will set up his image and you won’t be able to buy, sell, or trade without worshipping him and his mark (Rev. 13:3-18). There will be martyrdom or sanctions for those who don’t – just like the truckers in Canada or just like Russia.

This is what it is like for believers in the world until Christ comes to establish His kingdom. This is why we pray “*Our Lord come*” and “*Thy kingdom come*” – because the kingdom and the Lord come at the same time to end “*the times of the Gentiles*”. As long as we’re in the times of the Gentiles, trust is going to be the chief characteristic of God’s people.

WHEN IN BABYLON: Trust is the chief characteristic of the Church.

In his book, *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, McClain said, “We are called to have an unlimited willingness to trust Him in all things....”ⁱⁱ Between the time period of Acts 2 and Christ’s return, the age of the Church, is in a time of **humiliation** (Phil. 3:21), **testing** (James 1:12), **trouble and persecution** (2 Cor. 4:8-9), **suffering and groaning** (Rom. 8:18-23), **patient endurance** (James 5:7-11), **refining and perfecting** (James 1:2-4), **unceasing labor** (1 Cor. 3:8-15), **agonizing conflict** (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7), **unrelenting struggle toward a goal which lies beyond this age and world** (Phil. 3:12-14), **We walk by faith** (2 Cor. 5:7), **live in hope** (Rom. 8:24-25), **endure hardship as good soldiers** (2 Tim. 2:3), and **look to things which are not seen** (2 Cor. 4:18).... The career of the Church stands in contrast to the prophetic picture of a golden age which occurs when the Kingdom of God is on earth.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the dedication ceremony of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, he decrees that everyone who doesn’t bow down and worship is going to be thrown into his **furnace of blazing fire**. Furnaces, or kilns, like this were used for manufacturing bricks but could be used for the king’s judgments and temps could reach 1,000 degrees centigrade so it’s pretty terrifying.^{iv} The Jews, forbidden to be involved in idol worship, are in a pinch. What will they do? What would *you* do in this pressured environment? Imagine it. The music is loud... your peers are bowing down...

8 For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. 9 They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: “O king, live forever! 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. 11 But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. 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.”

II. THE CHARGES. (VV. 8-12)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego don't bow down. They are willing to stand alone. And some of the Chaldeans, no doubt jealous of their promotions, take advantage of the opportunity to get rid of them. I'm sure they're tired of these principled men. One of the lessons we need to learn from this is that God's will is often very mysterious to us. We tend to think that if we're in the will of God, everything will be hunky-dory – that smooth sailing in life is the sign of someone blessed by God. But that's not always the case, is it? We could argue that most of the heroes in the Bible went through incredible trials and suffering (Heb. 11) and **the reason they're heroes is because they trusted God in it all.**

WHEN IN BABYLON: To live for God in troubling times, you must trust God at all times.

They say you might be the only Bible some people ever read and if you live it out, many people won't like you. They might work to get rid of you. Andy Woods calls this **the parable of the whale**. When the whale surfaces and shows themselves, it's a keen opportunity not only to take pictures, but to jab a spear into them. If God is working in your life and you stand out by standing for biblical truth and principles, you're a threat some will want to cancel because you expose their lack of God in their life. You see, Nebuchadnezzar raised his standard, but while he was doing that, God raised His standard – the believers who refuse to bow the knee to an immoral, idolatrous culture. This is why *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,”* and why we should not think it strange when **fiery trials** come upon us (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12).

III. THE INTERROGATION. (VV. 13-18)

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. 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? 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?” 16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 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. 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.”

They say, *“Every man has his price!”* Not these men! They couldn't be bought. Upon interrogation before the raging king, the 3 men **respectively** respond that they will not worship or bow down to anyone but their God. And Nebuchadnezzar knows this. That's why they say, *“we don't need to answer you about this matter.”* It's like saying, *“You know us. You know we won't. You know our*

faith prohibits worship of anyone but God.” Their comment speaks of a consistent testimony in the past. A refusal to compromise their beliefs and behavior which is another lesson for us:

WHEN IN BABYLON: Life in Babylon calls for spiritual consistency.

But there’s another lesson: When is it okay to disobey government? Government is a **divine institution** God established for good. He established it right after Noah’s flood to keep the sin nature in check (Gen. 9; Rom. 13). If people won’t listen to God’s Spirit, Word, or conscience, all that’s left is the threat of punishment. But what about when government tries to get you to do that would cause you to disobey God? At that point, **we must obey God rather than men** (Acts 5:14). But notice: do so **respectfully**. If you’re not respectful, you’re not very helpful. These men were respectful, brave, and courageous in their faith decision. But how could they be? It’s right there in verse 17: *“our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... But even if He doesn’t, let it be known to you,... we won’t worship.”* They understood their all-powerful and sovereign God was in control. If there was any question, it was not about God’s power, but His will.

WHEN IN BABYLON: Fear God more than the fire.

God is all powerful. Earthly king’s are not. They knew there is a Most High King they will ultimately answer too. Jesus said don’t fear those who can harm the body but Him who can destroy soul and body in hell (Mt. 10:28). And let’s remember that while the whole world may seem like it’s falling apart – from God’s perspective, it’s falling into place. We always have that hope.

WHEN IN BABYLON: Focus on the promises, not the problems.

Those who have Christ, have everything you need. No one can separate you from Christ and he will vindicate you and glorify you. One day, you will reign with Him over the nations (Rev. 2:26-29). You don’t have to win in this life to win in the next.^v It’s training time for reigning time, as Woods says, and sufferings are a badge of honor for Christ.

IV. THE VINDICATION. (VV. 19-27)

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. 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. 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. 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. 23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up. [this furnace apparently had an upper door to put them in and a lower, side door so you could see inside] 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.” 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!” 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. 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.

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

So the 3 are tied up and thrown in. As they’re thrown in, the executioners die from the heat of the furnace it’s so hot. But as for the 3, they’re not even harmed. In fact, they’re unbound and they’re walking around talking with an angelic deliverer which most people think, myself included, is a **pre-incarnate appearance of Christ** in the OT. These OT appearances are what we call a **theophany**, which gives us another lesson:

WHEN IN BABYLON: Jesus is with you in the fiery trials of life.

He’s with you in that He’s been through what you’re going through and even more so. But He’s also with you in that He lives in you by His Spirit, He is fully aware of it, and stands in solidarity with you. He takes it personally (Acts 9:4). Jesus stands in the fire with His people.

Examples Today: Christians in the Middle East. Christians in Ukraine if the Russian Orthodox Church takes over. We can think of the Christian small business owners like **Jack Phillips**, the Colorado baker who faced the threat of jail time and fines for declining a wedding cake for a same-sex couple in 2012 or refusing to make a gender-transition cake in 2017. Legislature like **Bill C-4** in Canada, the **Equality Act** in America, or the **Fairness Ordinance** in Lincoln, NE all threaten or fine residents for counseling people in biblical terms, even if it’s just a private conversation. Thankfully they got enough signatures for now to shut it down in Lincoln it sounds like. But this is when we are called by God to stand. The world can raise up its standards, but God through His people, will be His standard against it. And through their courage, others will believe and stand – just like with what happened to Nebuchadnezzar. He recalls the impression that **their trust in the Most High God** had on him and I think we’ll see him heaven.

Courageous faith is contagious faith.

If we want to see people come to Christ and change the world, we must respectively refuse to compromise our biblical convictions and trust God no matter what happens.

And what a fitting passage this fitting for a young man's baptism this morning. In a world that often rejects Christ, getting baptized is a way of identifying with Christ, with the Gospel, and with the Church. Just like Daniel and his friends, this is a way of saying, "*I've purposed in my heart to follow Christ.*"

ⁱ Erwin Lutzer, *The Church in Babylon*.

ⁱⁱ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (BMH Books), 413.

ⁱⁱⁱ McClain, 432.

^{iv} Paul Tanner, 25.

^v Lutzer.