



Thriving in Babylon / Book of Daniel  
Wk. 4 "Facing Idolatry"  
By Pastor Jody May

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## Daniel 3:1-12 ESV

### Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image

<sup>3</sup> King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>3</sup> Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>4</sup> And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup> that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." <sup>7</sup> Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

### The Fiery Furnace

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

<sup>20</sup> And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup> Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.

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## Thriving in Babylon... Where are we headed?

For all of Chapter 2 we said last week there is an overarching main point:

**God's Wisdom and Power is what Supervises all of History.**

As we get into Chapter 3 this morning, if you head into that chapter with that main point in mind, you come to the conclusion that the situation that these men found themselves in **was set up by God**. It wasn't a run with bad luck, it wasn't a coincidence, it was a providential meeting between our God and the gods of Babylon, so that the world would see who is the strongest one.

This encounter along with other pictures of OT persecution are recorded **to point us to the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth**, to the incarnation when He would choose to lay down His life and endure His own persecution ([John 10:18](#)). To know His death on the cross was the plan, to get the world to watch as He was high and lifted up ([Isaiah 57:15-19](#)), so God could demonstrate His strength recorded for all ages. Just as the three men were preserved by the presence of the Christ in the furnace, Jesus would walk out of death on His own to show the world He is not just 'like' a Son of God ([Dan. 3:25](#)), **He IS the Son of God!**

This morning as we enter into this text, I want you to keep in mind how this story reflects Jesus; His declining to worship Satan in the desert ([Luke 4:1-13](#)). Keep in mind how He perfectly accepted His Father's will to let Him endure His trials even if it meant His death, (*He chose not to go through what seemed the easy road of Satan's offer*). Then ask yourself is Jesus worth the hype, is He worth the praise, is He worth the effort to follow, (worship)? And I say that today because in the text, in learning how to **Thrive in Babylon**, we have to learn about the reality of **Idolatry, the worship of a 'being', an 'idea', or things outside of God**. The men in our story faced death if they don't comply with the demand to worship – **(a sign of fealty)** the golden image, Jesus went into death and came back when He would not bow to Satan's request for worship, and if we are going to thrive, we have got to know what temptation to Idolatry looks like and we have to receive the strength to stand when we are tempted to bow down. (The process = **setting up, calling to worship, consequences**)



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## 1. Setting up the Golden Image

Since we last left our story last week Daniel was elevated by God above all the other wise men in the kingdom, by God's Power and Wisdom, and now has become the leader of all the enchanters, magicians, astrologers – those that we call *Wise Men*. In return King Neb bowed down to him ([Dan. 2:46](#)) and offered incentives for Daniel's favor. In return Daniel used the opportunity to raise up his three friends: Hananiah called Shadrach, Mishael called Meshach, and Azariah called Abednego <sup>(1:7)</sup>.

These men became leaders in the local provinces not only to support King Neb but to support the life of the Jewish refugees. That would be needed you see for the Israelites had long been enemies of some in this empire, the Syrians and the Northern Jews (Samaritans) who would most likely also be in the court of the king. One can only imagine the sour taste in their mouth now as these same Jews came to power over them, not by their own hand but by the hand of their conqueror. All by God's providence. Even in their defeat the Jews were still favored in life over them.

Then, out of the blue, they get their chance for some payback, a little pride bump if you will, for they have no problem doing what the king wanted:

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Golden Image**

**3** King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. **2** Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

King Neb has set up an Idol, an image in gold, no doubt from the countless stores of amassed wealth taken in from other kingdoms. So, what is the purpose of spending this loot on a statue? **Making a national monument to represent the governmental authority of the state**, personified in Neb. **This would be like for us** spending billions in tax dollars on something we did not agree on like the production of a **bigger federal government**.



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King Neb seems to be concocting a plan to unify all the different people in the Kingdom, he's developing his own scheme to introduce a culture that seeks to assimilate all other cultures into one and offer incentives to turn those in that do not, **in effect canceling them**. We see this happening again with Rome, don't we, and if you study history long enough you will see this pattern popping back up all the time. Those in power always set up systems of state allegiance to unite people while at the same time persecuting those who do not follow the state ways. **That's why our founding fathers put a constitution in place, along with the first two amendments, to avoid that tragedy.**

The only way King Neb can do this is **instead of** letting everyone worship their gods and practice their life as they see fit is to elevate one religion above all else, and to have everyone swear **allegiance/worship/show fealty** ([Luke 4:7](#)) to the state as their highest priority. He wants the allegiance of ALL his leaders. He wants the leaders to accept it first and then take it to the people they represent. And please don't misinterpret this, this is not just for good politicking **he wants personal worship, he's an egomaniac!** It seems that he has taken Daniel's dream interpretation and is trying to turn it into a reality, an actual image to be erected. Then as Daniel represents the one true God, he gives Daniel a place of honor below the king, this god should work for the King, right? Do you see the strategy in all of this? Neb - **I will use the evangelicals of this day and age to get me what I want, the subservience of their followers.**

It has been a constant ploy of the world to gain the support of religious leaders to sway the masses into complying with governmental efforts. There would have been no Fascist Party in Germany without the support first of the church, there would be no Communism in Russia without the support of the church, and to their dismay when the dictators came into power these churches all had to bow to the newly erected governmental authorities or they were persecuted like everyone else.

Folks, I want to point out that we had a group of Christian leaders called [Evangelicals for Biden](#), who pledged to support President Biden prior to the election if he would uphold the [Hyde Amendment Restrictions](#). He has turned his back on any verbal agreement whatsoever and has actively come against



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the Hyde agreement. The power of the state is never about working with evangelicals to make a better world, NO, it is always about remaking the world in their image, because that's what power does to people. It wants to make you take God out of everything, erecting images of collected power to be served instead of the state striving to serve its' people.

**Before we go any further this morning, we have to talk about what is an idol worship/idolatry.**

### **Romans 1:18-25 ESV**

#### **God's Wrath on Unrighteousness**

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. <sup>19</sup> For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. <sup>20</sup> For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. <sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

<sup>24</sup> Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, <sup>25</sup> because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Paul, at this time, was speaking into a world very much like ours. There were people who were religious that sought to worship deities that they believed influenced their lives and then there were those that put their faith in Rome and embraced the emperor worship of the day. Paul is defining the condition that exists for you and me, and what makes us so susceptible to manipulation. **We desire to worship something, as long as this something serves the purpose of fulfilling our desires.** – So, **Idolatry**, the worship of a 'being', an 'idea', or things outside of God for the **purpose of getting something you want.**



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I want to propose now the thing we are going to learn over the next couple of weeks, and hopefully it become a reality you keep here for the rest of your life:

**Idolatry blinds and binds while the  
Worship of God reveals and redeems!**

The wrath of God is revealed in the fact that HE has turned people over to their foolishness in worshipping anything other than Him. This is what Idolatry does, it **blinds** people to truth, and it **binds** them to their sinful behavior. People will keep worshipping those things that give them what they want. BUT when God is worshiped, when He is considered first, we live with His goals in mind, we are able to think, we can **see** the allusion of the worldly structure for what it is. It means you have been **redeemed**.

The Problem we all face in here today is this: **Where do we put God?** Are we convicted as His people when we discover we are spending too much time concerned over the things of this world and what they can bring us?

It might not be pagan worship, but we sure can contrive pagan like tendencies.

- We put people on a pedestal when they give us the kudos we need (babies, spouses, employees).
- We get mad when our political favorites are not elected.
- We get mad when our favorite sport team/person doesn't win.
- We get mad when people challenge our positions on FB (means someone is perhaps challenging your idol).

**John MacArthur:<sup>1</sup>**

And I think about Abraham, who waited, and waited, and waited until he was 100 years old to have a son, and then God said, "I want that son, and I want him on an altar, and I want him dead." And Abraham said, "All right, God, I

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, "Uncompromising Faith in the Fiery Furnace," *Grace to You*, Website, Sermons, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/27-10/uncompromising-faith-in-the-fiery-furnace-part-1>, Web 05/27/2021.





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love that son. I don't worship that son above You, and if You say, 'slay him,' I'll slay him.

But we make gods out of people. We make gods out of pride. We make gods out of plenty. We make gods out of possessions. And I'm not saying you shouldn't love people, and I'm not saying you shouldn't be committed to your family, your children, and your wife. *(But they can't come before God)*

Kind of an interesting story, Charles Spurgeon, just before he got married - and ~~I can't even imagine what it must have been like to be married to him -~~ but, before he got married, he had picked up his fiancée to take her to a place where he was going to preach. And they were separated in the jostling in the crowd and they were kind of lost and thousands of people were pushing in to hear him preach. And so he sort of pushed his way up to the platform. And after the meeting was over he couldn't find her anywhere, so he just went over to her house. And he found her there and she was pouting. And she said, "Charles, you left me in that crowd all alone and you weren't even concerned where I was."

This is what he replied: "I'm sorry, but perhaps what happened was providential. I didn't intend to be impolite, but whenever I see a crowd like that waiting for me to preach, I'm overwhelmed with a sense of responsibility. I forgot about you. Now, let's get one thing straight, it will have to be the rule of our marriage that the command of my Master comes first. You shall have the second place. Are you willing as my wife to take a second place while I give the first place to Christ?" Well, wonderfully she was willing and became a faithful wife.

So, we have a desire to worship a desire to placate to those that give us what we want, so watch the cunning schemes of man to get everyone on the same page:

## **2. The Calling for Worship**

### **Natural progression of teaching people to become idolatrous**

<sup>3</sup>Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.



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And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>4</sup> And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, <sup>5</sup> that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup> And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace." <sup>7</sup> Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

You see in a world that is all about the physical, when its' all about the immediate, when its' all about the easy path, people will take the path of least resistance to avoid confrontation.

You may say Jody, you know there is a threat of being burned alive here! Yes, you are right, but I would also say the decision is made easy because the image represents everything they wanted. Bow down to the image to get the security and peace of Babylon. What's wrong with compliance, giving up one's rights, to do what everyone else is doing in the kingdom? The problem is that according to Romans 1 and Exodus 20 no one is to have any other gods before God:

**Exodus 20:3-5 ESV**

<sup>3</sup> "You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

These leaders left that meeting only looking at the ease of the command not at the violation of the creational order. **People that are usually in good with the powers that be rarely look at the compromises they are making in their religious practices.** These leaders went back to their people to persuade them to pursue this idolatry. This continued to be the practice of the





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enemy in the early church's day which means it is something we face as well so we would do well to heed a warning:

### 2 Peter 2:1-3 ESV

2 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup> And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. <sup>3</sup> And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

I think many of us think about the dangers of prosperity gospel preachers as they are controlled many times by **greed**, but the same can be said of any pastor or religious leader that has something to gain **by becoming friendly with the culture**. Currently culture calls for pastors to push a narrative that claims you need to be woke to **Systematic Racism** as taught by **Critical Race Theory** making your new identity as a culturally enlightened individual who is now **WOKE** which has now become the new criteria for Justification.

Family we **cannot cheapen God's Word** by making it less potent than cultural relativism, **nor can we whore out the church's pulpit** to a political/social/economic philosophy, idea, or leader who wants to lead astray those we love. AND we definitely **dare not make Jesus' death and resurrection cheap** by claiming we need to **add to a gospel** that already declares it is by the authority of God's Word alone we are saved, and it is by this Word by which men can be reconciled to each other! **We ALL were slaves** at one time, our master was sin, but Jesus has set us free, so we dare not claim to be in bondage still and we dare not claim that someone needs more cultural clarity or niceness or WOKENESS to be saved...

But there are some consequences friends, if this is the way in which you want to believe.

### 3. Consequences of not bowing down

#### The Fiery Furnace



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

<sup>20</sup>And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>21</sup>Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.

**What must we do?**

**Let's remember now our main point again:**

**Idolatry blinds and binds while the  
Worship of God reveals and redeems!**

If our minds are cleared, if God has been revealing to us the true nature of reality, then we need to be prepared to move into action.

**1. Be PREPARED by Knowing your History.**

**Religious Background** – we all need to work at understanding the trials that have come before us. We have seen people fight to bring progressive thinking into the church over the last 150 years of which the result, more times than not, was to kill the church's holiness making her look like everyone else.

I want you to pray with me about the SBC over the next couple of weeks before the national convention and let's ask the eyes of our leaders open to the drift towards liberal theology.



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**Personal Background** – we also need to be aware of what we like to make as idols in our lives. I am actually going to provide some material for us all next week for our Community Groups to help us identify some idols in our lives.

**2. RESOLVE yourself towards an outcome before the pressure comes.**

**Three things we run from (REACT) pain, poverty, & penalization/persecution.**

**Instead, we need to choose (PLAN) to run to: worship, work, & the win!**

Christ, before His ministry had already resolved that His Father would be glorified through His worship of His father. So, when Satan came with the demand to bow down, it was already a NO in His mind, **He had planned.**

**Jesus chose to worship** God **FIRST** instead of bending the knee to solicitation from the ruler of the world. - **worship**

**Jesus chose to work** out His Salvation **FIRST**, instead of being given the Kingdoms by the devil, and won our freedom in the end. - **work**

Jesus chose the path of the cross because only through obedience to the cross would resurrection be obtained. – **the win**

**Friends to be prepared for the lure of idolatry we must resolve ourselves to PLAN to serve Him FIRST before that temptation ever comes!**

Family, this is just week one, to help us understand what idolatry is, **Idolatry, the worship of a 'being', an 'idea', or things outside of God** for the **purpose of getting something you want** and that we are still under the threat constantly to do it. If we have not chosen proactively not to bow, we will give in every time.

Let's pray this week and remember Jesus is worth all our worship and by His power alone we are released from this world for we have been redeemed.



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**PRAYER**

**COMMUNION**

**BENEDICTION**

Go in the name of the Father, that uses His people to demonstrate He alone is worthy to be praised.

Go in the name of the Son, who purposed in His heart to worship no other God, defeating Satan, and redeemed our souls.

Go in the name and power of the Holy Spirit, that empowers us NOT to worship created things but helps us demonstrate true God worship.