

Uncompromising Faith in the Fiery Furnace, Part 1

Daniel 3:1-3

27-10

Father, we thank You that we can come to You in the times of life that are difficult for us, and we thank You for Your great grace to sustain us in the time of our need. We do pray for Rodney and his family in the loss of their grandfather, that You would especially be near to them, and they would even discern in this the meaning of life and eternity, the significance of Christ and His resurrection, that they might come to know that eternal life that comes only through faith in Him.

We thank You for Rodney, and we pray that You will bless him even in this time, as well. And, Lord, as we come together to look at Your Word tonight, we pray with open hearts and open minds, we might be taught of Your Spirit and that we might not be listening to a human voice but that we might hear You speak for Your praise and glory we pray, Amen.

We're looking at Daniel chapter 3 tonight and it's going to take us a couple of times to get through this tremendous chapter, an exciting chapter with much truth and many principles to deal with. And I trust that the Spirit of God will in a very special way make known to you the truths that are here as we go along. It reiterates some of the principles that we talked about in chapter 1 particularly, and I think you'll see that as we go along.

In chapter 1 of Daniel, we saw a very severe stress situation which Daniel and his three friends were able to meet with their great faith in God, and we likewise see the same thing happening in chapter 3. Tonight we want to begin to look at the chapter and we'll see how far we get along as we go.

I read the other day about a man who, being a very religious man decided that he would purchase a statue of Jesus Christ for his home. And so he purchased this statue of Christ, he brought it home, and he set it on the coffee table in the living room. His wife was somewhat distressed, not feeling it went exactly with the decor that was there, removed it to the den. Later on, the husband moved it again to another area of the house, which finally prompted the two-year-old to say, "Can't you decide what to do with God?" Very profound question.

There are a lot of people in the world who can't decide what to do with God. What are we going to do with God? Is the question, really, of chapter 3 of Daniel. Some people don't know where to put God and some people do. And tonight we're going to find out about one man who did not know where to put God and three men who did. And it sets for us a rather constant theme throughout Scripture and throughout human history, the conflict between those who give God a rightful place and those who refuse to do that.

Now, let me give you an introduction of some length so that you'll really have a running start, and then the passage will just unfold for you. Man is incurably religious. Man, generally, man is basically

is religious. That's very obvious as you go around the world. You find that all peoples, and all races and ethnic groups have some substance of religion. Man is an incurably religious creature. He inevitably bows at some shrine. It is either the worship of the true God or some false substitution, but man is incurably religious.

Romans chapter 1 tells us this, because Romans 1 says that when man "knew God, he glorified Him not as God." And turning his back on the true God, he began to worship the creature more than the creator. And he made gods out of wood and stone, and he began to worship man, and beasts, and creeping things. In other words, what Romans 1:18-23 is telling us is that man is incurably religious, and if he turns his back on the true God, he will not go into a vacuum, he will create other gods out of snakes, and birds, and beasts, and men. And he will worship the creature if he does not worship the creator.

Now, whenever man does this and whenever man invents, or concocts, or prescribes, or defines his own god, he makes him into the kind of god he wants him to be. And there's an interesting cycle. He usually becomes like his god. And so here is man making the god that he wants to exist, and then becoming like that god that he himself has manufactured.

The Old Testament tells us much about man's religious nature and how he does this. It is characteristic of man to create a god like himself and then become more and more like that god. This way he accommodates his sinfulness. You see, the difficulty with worshiping the true God is you have to face the reality of your inadequacy and your sinfulness. So if you reject that, you invent a god who is a lot like you, and it's a lot easier to live with that kind of a god.

In Psalm 115, we get a little bit of an insight into how man does this. It says, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake." The psalm begins with a statement that God is to be glorified. "Wherefore should the nations say, Where is now their god? But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They who make them are like unto them: so is everyone who trusteth in them."

You see? They make them and they're like them. Men invent gods of their own making. The Bible says, "God created man in His own image." But man creates gods in his own image - the ultimate rebellion, man inventing his own gods.

Now, there is then a constant conflict in the world, and that constant conflict is between the worship of the true God and the worship of the false gods made out of the imagination and the mind of man. And deities made by man always express the sinfulness of man, always. Now I don't have time to go into this. Sometime we should do a study on idolatry and really get in it in detail. But just to give you an illustration, whenever men invent gods, those gods mirror the deficiencies and the sins of men.

For example, in reading the Old Testament you come repeatedly across a god known as Baal, B-A-A-L. Now Baal is not really a proper name. It is a word that simply means "lord," and there were many baals, many lords, many pagan gods. And as you study the baals of ancient history, you find that they inevitably carried out the sinfulness of men in their character.

For example, just one illustration, it was believed of the Canaanites and the people around Israel that Baal was the force behind sexual power in the man and the woman. Baal was the power behind the sexual part of human nature. And so therefore any sexual act became a performance of the power of Baal. All sex relations, then, according to those who worshiped Baal became sacred acts because they then became demonstrations of this great force of the god Baal.

Now, the temples of Baal were then occupied by priestesses who were known as “sacred prostitutes.” The Hebrew in Hosea 4:14 even calls them by the root word of “holy women.” They actually were considered to be holy women because Baal was believed to be active in the sexual act itself, and so worship, then, became a sexual act with a temple prostitute. To have intercourse, then, with a temple prostitute was to be united in power with Baal, a very consummate act of worship.

Now, that is the way man invents his gods, to accommodate his own vile sinfulness. Inevitably, people - now get this - when men invent gods, those gods will lead men into immorality because they will be gods that reflect the sinfulness of the men who invented them. That is exactly why in Romans chapter 1, you have the fact that when they knew not God, or “when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God.” They changed the glory of God into an image. They made their own idols. And immediately in verse 24 you read this, “Wherefore God also let them go into uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.”

In other words, you have the rejection of the true God in verse 21. You have the establishment of the false gods in verse 22 and 23. And you have the consequent immorality in verse 24. And it goes all the way down to verse 32. It talks about God giving them up to vile affections. It talks about homosexuality. It talks about a burning in lust one toward another. It talks about unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maligning, whispers, backbiters, haters of God, insolent, proud boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful, and so forth. And all of those are simply representations of the kind of worship that man himself builds. And when man does that, it says that he not only does them, but has pleasure in them that do them.

Idolatry is always an abandonment to an immoral standard. Idolatry in the Old Testament even goes under the name of a whoring. It says Israel went awhoring. It says Israel committed adultery, because that kind of prostitution was so integral to idolatry.

Now, idolatry, then, is the corruption of true worship. And from the very beginning, man has always set up his false gods, and the running conflict has gone on through all of human history, the conflict between the worship of the true God and the worship of false gods. In fact, let me say something that’s kind of a basic statement you ought to remember. Idolatry is the most basic issue about which God is concerned. Did you get that? Idolatry is the most basic issue in terms of the life of man in which God is concerned.

You say, “How do you know that? How do you know He’s more concerned about that than other things?” Because it says so in Exodus chapter 20. That is the first of the ten commandments that the Lord gave and it relates to idolatry. Exodus 20:3-4, listen. “Thou shalt - ” here’s the first commandment. “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any

carved image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children under the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy to thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments.”

All right? There you have the first and the second commandment. The first one, have no other gods before Me. The second one, make no graven image. The primary issue, then, in the ten commandments, the beginning of it all, is the affirmation that there is to be no god substituted for the true God. That is God’s basic concern in His dealing with man.

And Romans 1 charts the course for us, traces the appalling shipwreck that results when God is thrown overboard. When you abandon God, and you turn God loose, and you let God go, and you turn your back, then you invent your own gods because man is incurably religious, and in inventing his own gods he makes gods like himself, he becomes more like them, and damns his own soul in the process.

Now, Exodus chapter 20 says, “Thou art to have no gods before Me.” Isaiah tells us again and again in chapter 43 and around that area that there is none other but the true God. In Deuteronomy, “the Lord our God is one” Lord. The Bible explicitly says there are no other gods but the true God. The Bible crushes literally all idols, whether they are idols of stone, idols of wood, idols of metal, or idols of the mind, or idols of the heart, or idols of the emotions; whether they are tangible or intangible, whether they are external or internal; all idols are crushed in the statement of God “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me, thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image.” And yet, though this is the first and primary commandment of the Scriptures, it is a looming reality in all of human history. Man inevitably continues this flight into idolatry.

Leslie Flynn states it so well. He says, “Like the flow of a river which cannot be stopped but which can be diverted, the yearning of man’s soul for an object of worship can easily turn from the true God to another god.”

So, the Scripture over, and over, and over, and over forbids idolatry, forbids it. Now let me give you a sample of what the Scripture teaches so you’ll understand a little bit of what Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, the three Hebrews that you know as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, their Babylonian names, so that you’ll understand why they stood the way they stood.

They knew that idolatry was unacceptable to God. They knew that they could not please God and bow down to the image of gold erected in chapter 3. And why did they know that? Because the Word of God was so very explicit. And though they didn’t have the whole revelation of God as we do, they had enough of it to know.

Let me run by you some of the things that the Scripture says about idolatry, and it’s going to come pretty quick, just listen. I’m not even going to give you the Scriptures. I just want you to get it kind of like a machine gun. Idolatry consists - and here are a list of things that I found in the Scripture - idolatry consists of: Bowing down to images, worshiping images, sacrificing to images, worshiping other gods, swearing by other gods, walking after other gods, speaking in the name of other gods, looking to other gods, serving other gods, fearing other gods, sacrificing to other gods, worshiping

the true God by an image, worshiping angels, worshiping the hosts of heaven, worshiping devils, worshiping dead men, setting up idols in the heart, covetousness, sensuality. Because all of these things change the glory of God into an image.

In the Bible, idolatry is described in these terms. It is an abomination to God, in Deuteronomy 7:25; it is hateful to God, in Deuteronomy 16:22; it is vain and foolish, Psalm 115; it is bloody, Ezekiel 23; it is abominable, I Peter 4; it is unprofitable, Judges 10:14; it is irrational, Romans chapter 1; it is defiling, Ezekiel 20:7. You kind of get the picture that it's not good, don't you?

Another thought, idolatry results in men doing the following: Idolatry makes men forget God, go astray from God, pollute the name of God, defile the sanctuary of God, estrange themselves from God, forsake God, hate God, and provoke God. And the Bible says that idolatry will be punished with: A judicial death, a dreadful judgment which ends in death, banishment, exclusion from heaven, and eternal torment.

Now, that's pretty serious stuff. God has said an awful lot about idolatry. And because of its seriousness, you can reduce the warnings in the Bible down to three simple statements. When it comes to idolatry you are to do three things. Number one is to flee, 1 Corinthians 10:14, flee idols, flee from idols. Number two is to avoid idols, 1 Corinthians 10:10-20, have no fellowship at all with the table of demons. To flee, to avoid, the third one is to stay away from them. First John 5:21, "My little children, keep yourselves from idols." What does the Bible say? Flee, avoid, and stay away, and they all basically mean the same thing. Idols have no place. And it's a very, very serious matter to God, the matter of idolatry.

You say, "Well, you know, we don't have any idols. I mean, we don't - this is a very sophisticated 20th century." Yes, we do, and I'm sure you're aware that we have idols. The presence of idolatry is great even in our sophisticated society. Even in a society that is supposed to be Christian with biblical backgrounds, and the presence of churches, and the name of Christ, and God, and all that Christian influence can bring to bear on our society, we still are a society literally filled with idols.

Because, as I said, idolatry may be external in some societies, but in other societies it is internal. There are millions of people in our society who would never ever think of bowing their knee to a stone thing. You know, that would just seem ridiculous to them, or bowing down to some wood, or bowing down to some metal. But they spend all their life bowing down to some empty, useless god established in their own mind or in their own heart.

And an idol, frankly folks, is anything you put before God. It can be your car, it could be your hobby, your house, your wife, or anybody else, or any other item - your bankbook. A few years ago Christianity Today asked a panel of Christian scholars this question. What are the most prevalent gods of our time? Those mentioned included many things: The anti-Christian welfare state, scientism, communism, political democracy, nationalism, conservatism, social adjustment, behaviorism, secularism, humanism, naturalism, and the cult of progress. More personal idols were listed by Dr. Andrew Blackwood, professor emeritus of Princeton, he said, "America has these following gods: Self, money, pleasure, sex, romance, amusements, sports, education." And he added, "We need a return to the first commandment in the light of the cross."

Now, if I were to take the 20th century idols and boil them back down a little bit, you might get them

in a list like this. First of all, we worship the god of possessions, don't we? Possessions usurp the place of God. Do you spend more time thinking about possessions than you do about God? Do you spend more of your energy, more of your resources on possessions than you do on God? It's a good indication that you've got a problem in that area.

"The principle god of our times," says Dr. W. Stanford Reid of McGill University, "is our standard of living. We are so concerned with material possessions that we have forgotten they are a gift of God."

That's kind of what we were saying this morning. So one of the 20th century idols is possessions. Another one is plenty, plenty, love of money. Colossians 3 says, "Covetousness is idolatry." When you covet it, you worship it. Another one is pride. And covetousness, by the way, or plenty, I think about the rich man and the bigger barns don't you? I'll just build bigger barns, and bigger barns, and store all my crop. And the Lord says, "You fool. Tonight your soul will be required of you." And you can't make it living on eat, drink and be merry. So, possessions and plenty.

And then pride. I guess the main god of our society is the love of self. And we could say people are a god in our society. Some people idolize a child. They literally worship their child. It becomes perverse, the attitude they have. Some people worship a mate. Others worship a lover. Some worship a friend.

In contrast to that, don't you love to see Hannah, who all for so long had prayed and just begged God to give her a son, and God gave her a son, and then she didn't worship the child so that the child stood before God. She gave the child to the Lord and walked away and said, "That's the way it ought to be because that's the best place for the child."

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 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.

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.

I understand something of that. In the anticipation of the pulpit, the excitement of your heart, the mind begins to function and a lot of things just don't enter in to your thinking. He loved his wife. He loved her to the death. He never made a god out of her. His God was the true God.

We might also say that pleasure is a god in our society. Oh my, is that ever a god. Entertainment, oh, do we worship the God of entertainment. It's incredible. You know, every time I go to one of those places where you ride something, you know, Magic Mountain, Disneyland, or Knott's Berry Farm, or I don't know what all, I just - my theology goes wild in those places. I just - I look around and so many things bother me, you know, it's a fantasy world and people don't even live the reality of life. They're off on some fantasy, you know. And I think they're just paying all this money for a minute and a half of "Woo," and that's the way they live life. I mean, you know that's it. It's the whole thing. You go up to the top and down the deal and that's it. And you're down at the bottom and you come out of the deal, and there's your wife and your four kids standing there, just like they were when you got on. Go get in the same crummy car, and go to the same house, and have the same ole hassle, and the same job and you can't wait until you get back, and get up there again, and do it all over again. In fact, I know people who'd like to have that in their back yard. Live for the thrill, live for the thrill, the sensual, the feeling. We're lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

And I would also add that one of the gods of our society is projects. Have you noticed that? Not only possessions, plenty, pride, people, pleasure, but projects. The PTA, the Little League, world peace, politics, hobbies, religious programs, Kiwanis, Rotary, you name it. Projects.

And then there's prominence. Some people live to get in Who's Who, what's what, and why's why, and where's where. They want a chief seat in the banquet. They want to be on the social registrar. They love to see their name in the paper. They cut out every clipping that you can imagine. They want to be the chairman. And all of these gods end up in the trash heap of an empty, burned out life. Man is incurably religious. He will worship something, believe me.

A parable tells about an idol-burning ceremony in the backyard of a church. Every person had torn from his heart his dearest possession, ambition, his dearest achievement. And they all took it and put it on a heap and they said, "We're going to burn all our idols." Some people put their long hair there. Some people put their new Ph.D. there. Some people put their favorite antique there. Some put their not-yet-purchased but coveted mink coat there. But nobody could find a match, how inconvenient. And the parable says that all agreed that failure to burn them didn't mean they weren't willing to give them up. Slowly, the group drifted back to their homes with one or two backward glances.

Well, one lady didn't sleep well that night. And at last convinced herself that what she had given up was no idol at all. And early the next morning she sneaked back to the pile, hoping not to be seen, and when she got there she found her idol lonely and forlorn, the only one still left. Oh, how we cling to our idols.

You know, I'll just take it a step further. In the Scripture, it's not only wrong to worship something other than God, but it's wrong to worship God through the wrong method. You remember Saul, when he was told by God not to take anything, but to kill the king and all of the army, and take absolutely nothing. Came back with all those sheep, and all of those animals, and when Samuel came to him

and said, "What's going on?" And, "I hear the bleating of the sheep. You weren't supposed to take anything." And he says, "I've taken them all to worship God." And Samuel says to him, "The throne is removed from your family. God wants you to worship Him the way He says to worship Him, not the way you choose to worship Him."

Idolatry is worshipping the wrong god and worshipping the right God in the wrong way. And I think we have to be careful about that. I think idolatry is also worshipping symbols that may stand for God. Now we've all been aware of what is known as the iconoclastic controversy from the word *eikōn* in Greek, which means "image." Throughout the history of the church, the church was in its early manifestation of Romanism wanting to put everything in statues, and the Roman Church still does that. And the statues were everywhere, and there was always a controversy, and the going back and forth. The Eastern Orthodox Church finally smashed all the images because they felt it was idolatry. And you still have crucifixes, and other images, and saints, and so forth that represent a certain kind of idolatry. And you say, "Well, we don't really worship the idols, it's just that the representation is there." Yes, but the transition is so subtle, so subtle.

Let me show you an illustration. Look in your Bible at Numbers chapter 21, Numbers chapter 21. I told you this was a long introduction. In fact, I'll save the sermon till next time. Numbers 21:6, you remember how "the Lord sent the fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many people of Israel died."? This was when they were with Moses. And the people were being disobedient to God. The Lord sent fiery serpents, they bit. "Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us."

And Moses stood in their behalf. He prayed and the Lord answered somewhere between verses 7 and 8 and said, "Make a serpent, set it on a pole: it shall come to pass, every one that is bitten, when he looks up shall live." Now, watch what happened. The children of Israel had sinned. God says, "There's going to be a punishment. Snakes are going to bite you. If you look at the pole, you'll be healed."

Now, I believe the pole was symbol of God's power. There was no power in the pole. The power was with God. To look at the pole was simply an identification of their faith. And I want you to see what happened. Go over to 2 Kings, chapter 18. Along comes Hezekiah later in the history of Israel, and in Judah, we find that Hezekiah reigns as king, and he brings about a great revival. And one of the things he does in the revival is in verse 4, and I want you to see it. "He removed the high places, - " now watch this " - and broke the images, and cut down the idols." Now stop right there. He wiped out idolatry. But notice the next one. "And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan." Which means "the little brass thing." He treated it with disdain. Get rid of that little brass thing that they were all worshipping.

In other words, something started out as a symbol and it became an idol. And that is always a danger of an icon, that man will twist the symbol into an idol. So, whether you're talking about worshipping a false god, or worshipping the true God in a wrong way, or worshipping God to a wrong image, it is all forbidden in Scripture.

Now, having understood that, that idolatry is forbidden, look with me at Daniel 3, and let's see what unfolds. Remember now that these young men were well educated in Hebrew doctrine and theology,

and they knew exactly how God felt about idols.

Now, let's come to the text. We find in the opening of the text five major points, but I'm just going to start at the first one. First we find the ceremony, the ceremony in verses 1 to 3. Let's look at it.

"Nebuchadnezzar the king - " by the way, he's the king of the Babylonian Empire, which is a marvelous, incredible empire stretching over the known world of the Middle East, and we don't really know even how far, and it had the inherent power to have stretched around the world, could it have extended itself. Nebuchadnezzar was the greatest monarch on the face of the earth. "And he made an image of gold - " now watch this " - whose height was threescore cubits, and the breadth of it six cubits: and he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon."

Now, Nebuchadnezzar makes this huge image. Now what's interesting about it is that it is an idolatrous act. And it seems very strange in the light of 2:47. Look back at that. You remember in chapter 2 that Daniel had told this tremendous dream to Nebuchadnezzar? He had this dream about an image. It had a gold head, and it had brass, and then it had silver, and then it had iron, and then it had iron and clay mixed. And he told him the meaning of those things, and how all the world empires would come to pass, and how they would be destroyed by a stone cut out without hands in the final phase of their ten confederate kings. And he goes through all this marvelous interpretation of the dream.

And Nebuchadnezzar knows that Daniel is telling him things that his own seers, and magicians, and Chaldeans didn't know. And so in response, in verse 47, "Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face - " verse 46 " - worshiped Daniel, - " and so forth. And then in 47 he said, "Of a truth it is, that your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing that thou couldst reveal this secret."

Now, that's a pretty great statement. "Your God is the God of gods." Your God is the ultimate deity. "Your God is the revealer of secrets, the Lord of kings." That was in verse 47. Two verses later, he's building an idol to himself. Fickle, fickle Nebuchadnezzar.

Even the demonstration of the power of God couldn't override his unbelievable ego. Incredible. The man is an egomaniac. In fact, I believe when Daniel started telling him that dream he said, "The top is a head of gold and thou art that head of gold - " right there, Nebuchadnezzar tuned out and thought, "I'm the gold. Everything else is inferior to me." And so, he built a whole image of gold, just extended it all the way down.

"Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold." I take it that this was in a human form. It was made of gold, but believe me, it is so huge, three - you know what a cubit is? A cubit was measured from the elbow to the end of the hand. It's approximately 18 inches, so 90 - let's see, 60 cubits would be 90 feet high. That's really high. I guess a telephone pole is about 60 feet high, so it would be half again as high as that. And it was six cubits wide, which really isn't very wide. That's 9 feet wide, which means it was a great big long skinny thing. That would make it a ten-to-one proportion, and most human beings are four-to-one or five-to-one. Real skinny people are six-to-one and some are three-to-one. But anyway - I've seen some two-to-one, come to think of it. But normally it's about a ten - this kind of an image is a ten-to-one ratio, which means it either was this long thin thing, or that it was a high, high pedestal in which a normal five-to-one ratio man might have stood on. But it's a 90

foot high image.

Now, I don't believe that it was absolutely solid gold. That would have been utterly prohibitive in terms of economics, as well as a horrendous problem to construct and to move around. It is common in those times to find information to the effect that when they wanted to build such an image, they would build it out of wood, and then they would cover it with a substance, and they would overlay it with heavy gold. And it seems to me that that is the best way to perceive this image.

In fact, this was rather common. If you make a footnote of Isaiah chapter 40 and Isaiah chapter 41, you will note a couple of places in those two chapters where such an overlaid wooden image of gold is indicated. So that may be the more common way for them to do it.

Now, the cost would still be utterly incredible. Just beyond your belief the amount of money involved in that. Mining gold in those days and getting gold was so difficult that it was just incredibly valuable. By the way, the 60 cubits and the 6 cubits is kind of an interesting indication to us because the Babylonians had what is known as a sexagesimal system. We have a decimal system based on tens, right? They had a system based on sixes. And this is a very important footnote because it is an indicator of the authenticity of Daniel as truly representative of the Babylonian times. The higher critics want to shove it up nearly to the time of Christ to get it passed the prophecies that it predicts because they don't want the Bible to make predictions, otherwise it's a divine book. But because it uses what is known as this sexagesimal system rather than a decimal system, it's indicative of the Babylonian times.

Now, it's also fascinating to me - and this is another little footnote - that it is 60 cubits by 6, and I see two sixes there. The first king made an image of himself in sixes and if you read Revelation 13, you will find that the last ruler of the times of the Gentiles - Nebuchadnezzar was the first - the last monarch of the times of the Gentiles will also set up an image of himself.

It tells us that in Revelation chapter 13:14-15. It says, "He will make an image and the people will bow to the image, and the number will be - " what? " - six, six, six." It's as if it starts out with two sixes and ends up with three. Six is the number of man. Man tries, six, six, six, six, six, but he never hits seven, that's the number of perfection. That's reserved for God. And Nebuchadnezzar is like a preliminary picture of the antichrist.

Now, you'll notice in verse 1 that it says, "he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon." Now the plain of Dura, as far as we know, was just in the province of Babylon, just near the city itself, maybe six miles southeast of Babylon. And by the way, this is fascinating. A French archaeologist - I can't think if I can pronounce his name, I think it's Oppert, something like that - was doing some digs down southeast of Babylon a few miles and he came across, in his diggings, an absolutely huge brick foundation that must have held some gigantic statue or obelisk.

And as they began to do a little more study on the plain of Dura, it is the conviction of this French archaeologist, Oppert, that that is in fact the base of Nebuchadnezzar's image still remaining underneath the soil of the centuries that have covered it over. The image being long gone. Why? It was made of gold, folks. The next group that came in made sure that it didn't just hang around until it blew away.

The plain of Dura is a flat area where it would be visible. Sticking up in the plain of Dura, can you imagine the sun in the Babylonian area would be so bright that that thing would sparkle and shine in an incredible display of grandeur.

Now, what is Nebuchadnezzar doing? We need to at least talk about that for a minute before we finish. And we'll just cover this first point. What is he trying to do? What is he trying to prove? What's his point here? Well, I believe he had some reasons for this. He was a smart man. He was one of the world's greatest architects. He was one of the world's greatest statesmen. He was one of the world's greatest soldiers and strategists. This is not the village idiot. This is a very intelligent man. What's he doing?

Well, what he's doing is pulling together his nation in an act of unity. That's the first thing. He wanted to unify his nation. You unify your nation around a common objective. He wanted the whole pile of them to bow down to him. By the way, the Caesars did exactly the same thing, didn't they? They tried to get the whole Empire to worship them as a unifying factor.

Not only that, he wanted the allegiance of his leaders. He wanted all of his leaders to bow down to him. He wanted to make sure they were loyal and faithful to him. He wanted a single religion because he was afraid that a split of religion, because religion is so deep in the heart of man, that if they split over religions in the Empire they would fracture the empire.

But, there was something even beyond that. I think politically he wanted the unity of the empire. I think just in terms of his own personal needs, he wanted the worship and allegiance of his leaders. I think religiously, he wanted one religion to hold the people together, but beyond all of that the guy had an incredible ego, and he just sought self-glory, and he saw himself as the head of gold, and he just lost control of himself and decided to go whole hog and make himself an image so that the whole world would worship him.

He's little different than Herod in Acts 12. Herod gave a great speech, put on his fancy robe, and stood up, you know, in Acts 12 down there at Caesarea, and he gave a great speech and the people said, "Oh, it is the voice of a god and not a man." And he just loved it, you know. He just ate it up. And the Bible says immediately he was eaten by worms and died, because he gave not God the glory.

Well, Nebuchadnezzar didn't get eaten by worms, his due comes in chapter 4. We'll see that later. But he sought the glory. And the whole thing, then, poses a conflict for us throughout this chapter between worshiping the true God and worshiping this self-centered, humanistic egomaniac.

Now, I want you to see this choice clearly in mind because this is the choice everybody makes. You either worship God or false gods. Even as a Christian, listen, we can be lured to the worship of false gods, can't we? We really can. That's what this chapter calls for. Like the little five-year-old who said, "Where you going to put God, Daddy?" The question comes to us. Where are we going to put God?

Well, let's see the rest of the ceremony, very quickly, in verses 2 and 3. They both say essentially the same thing. "Then Nebuchadnezzar the king - " it's really kind of funny, I'll show you why " - Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together - " and here we go " - the princes - " and the word literally means "the governors." And I think it goes into descending rank here. The satraps were the

top governors of the provinces in the Babylonian Empire, all right? The satraps.

And then you have “the governors, and the captains.” As best we can know, they were sort of secondary rulers in the divisions. You might say the governors were in the states, and then the subdivisions were the counties, which were ruled by the governors and the captains. And then there are the “judges.” And by the way, there were chief arbitrators and there were provincial judges throughout the Babylonian Empire. Then there are “the treasurers,” and they are the masters of the treasury. And then there are “the counselors,” and they were the lawyers who made up the cabinets, and the senates, and whatever. And then there were “the sheriffs,” and they were just exactly what we think. They were minor judicial people who carried out justice.

So, you have all of these people and then finally says, “And all the rulers of the provinces.” He’d got everybody who was anybody in there to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. Now, he wants everybody’s allegiance. He wants to get the whole pile of them there, and so they all show up.

And then look what it says in verse 3. This is really interesting. “Then the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together under the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” Now why does it repeat all of that?

You know, when the Greeks came along and they were writing a Greek version known as the Septuagint, they just left out verse 3 because they said, “It’s ridiculous to repeat the whole thing.” I mean, it just says in verse 2, “the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs were all called.” And then in verse 3 it says “the princes, the governors, the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs all came.” Can’t you say that a little shorter? Can’t you just say everybody that was called came?

Well, I think it’s very subtle. I think it’s very subtle. The repetition of verse 3 is a subtle, almost humorous, insight into the lack of personal integrity by all the leaders of the whole Empire. And it reiterates that they were all big shots, but none of them had the courage to say “no.” They all came. They all came. Walked in there, spinelessly followed the lead of Nebuchadnezzar, all the great ones. You see, it’s tongue in cheek is what it is. All the big shots, all the great ones came, and they all had to be humiliated, and they all “stood - ” it says at the end of verse 3 “ - before the image Nebuchadnezzar had set up.”

There they all are, all the great princes, governors, captains, like a bunch of rubber ducks, already to quack the same way; no integrity, no character, no nothing. They responded as they were told. If Nebuchadnezzar says we all worship the idol, we all worship the idol, guys, we’ve got to keep our jobs.

But, it wasn’t so with some others. We’re going to find out who they were and why they did what they did and what happened next week. Let’s pray together.

While your heads are bowed for just a moment, let me just share a thought with you or two. It’s an exciting chapter. We’ve just begun to see it. Oh, next week it’s so exciting. But this is the time tonight as we begin for us to examine our hearts. What do you worship? When I say to you, “Is there an idol

in your life?" What do you think of? What immediately comes to mind? That's probably it. What have you placed before God? Where have you put God?

If you're not a Christian, you have all kinds of idols, and you are living a life that is denying the glory of God. Won't you come to Jesus Christ and make Him the Savior, confess Him as Lord? Then there are many of you Christians who have Christ as Lord of your life, and yet you find yourself diverted so often like that unstoppable river, and you find yourself going in the wrong direction toward idols of this world. This would be a great time to open your heart and confess to the Lord that you have some idols.

We talked about a lot of them, didn't we? In just some general categories. Have you examined your heart? What about possessions, or plenty, or pride, or people, pleasure, projects, prominence? Is it education, prestige, sex, money? What is it? Hobby, sports, entertainment? Anything? Oh Christ, and Christ alone is to be King.

Father, speak to all our hearts tonight. And may we set aside the gods of this world, the emptiness, the deities that cannot respond and only steal us away from the virtue of your true and pure and eternal love for us. May we set aside the idols and worship You. No matter what Nebuchadnezzars there are in our lives, who in their dominion and sovereignty cry to us to bow, may we never bow. May we not bow with the rest of the elite, and the erudite, and the educated, and the proud of the earth, but may we like those three young Hebrew boys, take our stand where it ought to be before almighty God, and unflinchingly stand true and never bow the knee to an idol.

Give us the kind of character that we see manifest in these three young boys. We who name the name of Christ and possess the power of the indwelling Spirit, we who have all the resources that they have and perhaps even more to stand true. Help us not to compromise, not only not to eat the king's meat and drink the king's wine, but not to worship the king's gods. Help us to stand true, uncompromisingly to take our place in adoring and glorifying You. We'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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