

GODLY LIVING IN A GODLESS WORLD

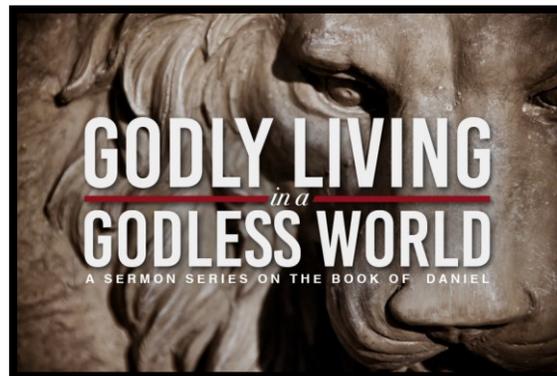
Expositional Study Of Daniel

Daniel 2:46-3:12

Written By

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I remember when we used to say the pledge of allegiance in class and then the teacher would pray for us. That “dangerous” practice all changed in 1962 when the Supreme Court ruled against permitting it based on their erroneous interpretation of the separation of Church and State. The 1963 Supreme Court ruling in *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*. Served to solidify their judicial decision a year later. After these decisions, school-sponsored prayer, Bible reading, or recitation of the Lord’s Prayer were deemed unconstitutional. I can vividly remember talking with friends out on the playground one morning after we didn’t have our usual prayer time. Even though I wasn’t a Christian at the time, I couldn’t understand what the big deal was. “What’s wrong with the teacher praying for us?” is what I thought.

I guess that became my first exposure to the fight of the government and the culture against the Christian faith, and the last fifty-three years of my life have seen that fight increase exponentially. David Limbaugh’s *Persecution* details the fight to drive Christianity from the American culture. From attacks against businesspeople who openly declare their intention on running their businesses on Christian principles, to anti-Christian dress codes, from curtailing mean-spirited and hateful Christian bill board messages against sexual deviancy, to working to silence Christians who speak up and out about sexual abstinence before marriage, from espousing tolerance as the chief American virtue so that all forms of sinful activity can be readily embraced, to Christians being disqualified from jobs because of the biblical beliefs about certain hot button cultural topics, the onslaught against the Christian faith is now at a fever pitch, and we all know it.

It is no longer a question of if your faith will be challenged and maligned, but when. It is no longer a question if the culture is intolerant and hateful of Christ and Christianity and willing to embrace anything and anyone else but Christ, but what new laws they will devise to silence the voices of people of Christian faith. And silence those voices they must for the Christian faith is the last line of defense against the unchecked flow of outright evil and perversion in said culture. So, prepare yourself for opposition. It is coming your way, as Christ predicted (*“Remember the word I spoke to you, No slave is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you,”* John 15:20), so you need to decide right now how you are going to respond. Will you fold like the proverbial lawn chair or will you stand like Daniel and his three friends did in the Babylonian culture? And there is no middle ground. Either you will be for Christ or for your culture (*“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters,”* Matthew 12:30).

As we will discover in the biblical study before us, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego enjoyed their newfound political power because of Daniel’s great, courageous faith to stand up and speak clearly to King Nebuchadnezzar for the living God, is when the Devil brought the battle against the faith to them. Expect no less, my friend. When you are enjoying your life as a free American, as a believer in the Lord Jesus, is when your faith will be broadsided by a culture bent on opposing everything you stand for and everything your holy book teaches. What will you do when, not if, that happens? The story from Daniel 2:46-3:12 gives us the first part of the much needed and timely answer:

Cultural Crucibles Call For Bold Belief (Daniel 2:46-3:12)

While in college, I came across a commentary on Daniel by the late Dr. Lehman Strauss, a converted Jewish German (his wife led him to Christ on Christmas day of 1927). Dr. Strauss for many years served as the Professor of Old Testament at the Philadelphia Bible Institute. His real impact on our country came through his thirty-four year stint as a national conference speaker, and his Bible Study Time weekly radio show touched and transformed thousands of lives for Christ. I introduce you to him because his books are still worth reading and they speak to our times with great clarity. He also has excellent biblical outlines. His analysis of this pericope is no exception, so with upmost honor I will utilize his form critical titles to help guide us through this pivotal section of the book of Daniel.

Just how bold belief should function in a fearsome, frightful time is introduced by Dr. Strauss’ divisional words. I’ve taken the liberty to modify them to suite our particular textual purpose.

Prepare For Faith Declarations (Daniel 2:46-49)

Read how King Nebuchadnezzar responded to Daniel’s dream identification and interpretation, by means of God’s raw power, and you will see what I mean:

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and did homage to Daniel, and gave orders to present to him an offering and fragrant incense. ⁴⁷ The king answered Daniel and said, “Surely your God is a God of gods and a Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, since you have been able to reveal this mystery.” ⁴⁸ Then the

king promoted Daniel and gave him many great gifts, and he made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon.⁴⁹ And Daniel made request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego over the administration of the province of Babylon, while Daniel was at the king's court.

The opening adverbial conjunction wedded to a preposition (בְּאֵרֶיךָ I have highlighted the preposition for you) is highly emphatic and designed to grab your attention.¹ All of this is so unheard of. The most powerful king on the planet at the time is reduced to falling at the feet of a deeply spiritual, twenty-something-year-old Jewish captive who helped him understand a private message from God rolled up in an ominous dream. King Nebuchadnezzar didn't bow to anyone. They bowed to him. But in this instance, he felt compelled to bow before one who had definitely connected with the living God in an amazing, over-the-top fashion.

Why did King Nebuchadnezzar bow before Daniel? Certainly not to worship him. Daniel, most certainly, would have never supported that activity. From the king's emphatic statement² regarding Daniel's God being the God of gods, it is readily apparent he paid humble homage to the God Daniel merely represented. After a moment of divine illumination and revelation, he had a flash of rare insight: at the top of the pantheon of gods was not Marduk, or Nammu, or Anu, or Kingu, or Enki, or Ea, or some other Babylonian deity, but Daniel's God. His words merely reflected what the Psalmist had said many years earlier:

“For you are great and do wondrous deeds; and you alone are God” (Psalm 86:10).

Isaiah, who battled with a plethora of false idolatrous gods three hundred years prior to King Nebuchadnezzar came to the same understanding and that's why he stated definitively:

“O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, enthroned upon the cherubim! You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made the heavens and the earth” (Psalm 86:10).

As I had said before, the belief in one, true, living God is the only logical position anyway. To have multiple supposedly necessary beings is highly illogical because they would ... and did ... differ from each other, and to differ means there is a lack, and if there is a lack then the god in question could not be god, for God, by definition, has no lack. Only the Jewish God fits the description of the true and living God of all so-called God because He is perfect in every way.

¹ This particular prepositional/adverbial conjunction is employed heavily by Daniel in his book. He uses it to arrest the reader's attention and help him to anticipate either radical positive or negative action. You will find it in the following locations: Daniel 2:14, 35; 3:3, 13, 19, 21, 26, 30; 4:4; 5:3, 17, 24, 29; 6:13, 17, 20, 24, 26; 7:1, 11. Other than Ezra, who uses this construction three times in his book, viz., Ezra 4:24; 5:2; 6:1, this phrase is unique to Daniel. He uses it to create narrative tension and suspense and leave the reader wondering, “What will happen next? Will there be godly or godless behavior in light of what is happening in the context?” Makes you stop and ask yourself the same question in light of your life context. What will it be? Godly or godless reaction?

² The prepositional phrase, “From a truth,” which is translated “Surely” in the NAS and NIV, is an emphatic use of the preposition wedded to the noun, *truth*, q^cshot (מִן־הַאֱמֻנָה) I've highlighted the preposition).

Unfortunately, the faith statement of King Nebuchadnezzar will be short-lived as we see in chapter three where he constructs an idol for all to worship. This is most interesting. We do not hear him renouncing his polytheistic belief system. On the contrary, he appears to be merely recognizing the prowess of Daniel's god in the pantheon of God's. It will be many more years, as we shall see in the rest of our study of this great book, before the living God gets the heart and mind of this carnal, mis-directed, power-minded earthly ruler. This is just the first step in the right direction to follow the true God; however, it is a step which reminds us all too well of the Jews who lined the streets of Jerusalem on Christ's triumphal entry some five hundred years later. Consider the similarities between these faith professors who were not faith possessors:

- Both had hard evidence that God existed.
- Both had hard evidence that God had definitely spoken.
- Both seemed to worship God (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19).
- Both were exposed to godly Jewish men sold out to God.
- Both were surrounded by an inept and power-hungry priestly class, who were more worried about their power and position and less about spiritual truth.
- Both had seen a mighty miracle of God, leaving them with indisputable proof that God had spoken.
- Both had a jealous priestly class (John 12:19).]
- Both turned violent and vicious against the spiritual truth of God (John 12:37; 19:15).

Mark this trend well, please, for eternity is at stake. You can be awash in the truth of God existence and the reality of Christ's person and work. You can know Bible verses. You can know Bible doctrine. You can mouth spiritual words. And you can be lost because you never embraced the Savior by faith. You have what Paul called a form of godliness while denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5). *A professor but not a possessor of the Christian faith ... is that you?* Only belief wedded to faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus saves (Acts 4:4; 8:12; 9:42; 13:48; 16:31).

All of this is so important because Christians must remember that not all those who sound Christian in an ever-darkening culture are Christians. Many King Nebuchadnezzar's hide within the local body for all the wrong reasons, and as we shall see in a moment, some of those reasons are to thwart, undermine, and sideline the faith. Do not be shocked in the days, months, and years ahead, as biblical Christianity and Christians will be opposed by those who embrace and espouse a more benign, "loving," diverse faith.

This reality logically segues into one of the most famous chapters of the Bible, Daniel three. Why it is famous? It is famous because this is where we encounter the courageous faith of Daniel's three friends in the face of death itself inside a fiery furnace. The whole all-too-applicable story unfolds before us with our next structural title:

Prepare For a Demand (Daniel 3:1-7)

What kind of demand? A demand to worship someone or something other than the living God. Read on and you will see what I mean:

¹ 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.

What just happened? Better yet, what happened between verse 46 of chapter two and these verses? How did a seemingly God-fearing king all of a sudden take his love of idolatry to a whole new, shocking, and jaw-dropping level? How could someone on a glide path to a faith relationship with the true God head in the completely opposite direction?

The Septuagint, or the Greek version of the Old Testament, informs us that between sixteen and twenty years elapsed between the chapters. Assuming that Nebuchadnezzar became king in 605 B.C., this would place the idol incident somewhere around the time of his destruction and domination of Jerusalem and Israel (586-585 B.C.). A lot can happen in a man's life in twenty years. That powerful exposure to spiritual truth as found in the Scriptures, as gleaned from a sermon, a Bible study, or through an intense and informative discussion with a trusted Christian friend, can be tarnished by time. In time, the ol' Devil can cause you to fall more in love with yourself, your reasoning abilities, and your own brand of religion. In time, the ol' Devil can help you create better rationalizations for opposing Christianity. In time, the ol' Devil can dupe you into thinking it is more important to live for the here and now instead of the hereafter. Yes, time has a way, if you are not careful, of diluting and destroying the encounter with the living God you experienced in your younger days. Perhaps this is, or has, happened to you. Believe me; it is never too late to turn back toward that truth and embrace, by faith, the God of that truth.

From what we learn in verse one, King Nebuchadnezzar willfully disregarded what Daniel had given him in the dream interpretation. Twenty years later, the king had gone from praising the prophet for squaring up with him about the temporal nature of his kingdom, to doing all he could within his power to extend his power. Instead of the king being the head of gold in an ever decreasing place among the last world empires, Nebuchadnezzar opts for making a ninety foot tall proportionally grotesque idol of gold ... thereby stressing the longevity of his rule. Knowing the soft nature of gold, and the propensity for making idols out of wood which was overlaid with gold, we can safely posit this is probably how this idol was constructed (Isaiah 40:19; 41:7). Yet, its very nature spoke of its ultimate worthlessness. What could be a less inferior expression of one's power than a hollow statue overlaid with some pricey, shiny gold? Oh, how illogically and tightly we hold onto the temporal things of this passing world. What or who are you holding onto?

The fact the idol was built around the number six is no fluke either. Six, biblically speaking, is the number of man since man was created on the sixth creative day (Genesis 1:26-31). Seven is the number of God and it represents divine perfection. Six is the number of man, and it prophetically points forward eschatologically to the Anti-Christ who takes the number

666 as his number (Revelation 13:18). So, in one way, the historical narrative points to the king's desire to establish perpetual State rule (despite God's clear decree to the opposite), and on the other, it points forward to the Anti-Christ who will use a fearsome, animated statue for the same purpose in the Tribulation (Revelation 13:11-16). To look at our times is to see how the State is on a roll to de-Christianize the culture, to discipline Christians for standing up for their faith, and to create its own moral codes so it (the State's new religion is tolerance and science, coupled with an almost religious zeal for a love of the planet at the expense of mankind's needs), in the final analysis, can be worshipped above all others. King Nebuchadnezzar merely set this all in motion with the erection of this State sponsored form of worship.

King Nebuchadnezzar, like so many despots after him, strategically located the idol in a place where masses of humanity could come and be brainwashed into a worship of the State. The plain of Dura's location is not known with specificity. Concerning possible archaeological locations, Dr. Leon Wood states,

The name has been found in extant texts, used in reference to several different localities, making exact identification uncertain. It might be Tell Der, sixteen miles southwest of modern Baghdad, or, perhaps more likely, Tolul Dura ("mounds of Dura"), twelve miles south-southeast of Hillah. Near the latter place runs the river Dura, which empties into the Euphrates some six miles south of ancient Babylon. The archaeologist Julius Oppert states that he found on one of these mounds a large brick square, forty-five feet on a side and twenty feet high, which he believes was the foundation for this very image. Whatever the location, the fact that the name "Dura" has been found to fit well into the nomenclature of the day argues further against this story being merely a legend, as set forth by some liberal scholars.³

In this location, scholars estimate that at least 300,000 could have gathered to pay homage to the new god. The king's skill at swaying and controlling the masses through an eye-popping marketing maneuver has only been played out repeatedly by power hungry rulers for the last 2,500 years, and, I'm sure, there is more to come.

It is significant the leaders were the first to bow. They are all detailed in descending order from the satraps, the "protectors of the realm," to the magistrates or the "sheriffs" or "the ones who give a just sentence."⁴ The strategic, sinister thinking should not be missed. *If you can control the people at the top, then the control of the people on down the line will be no problem.* Immediately the leaders fell in line because of peer pressure and fear:

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.

No one is heard arguing about the concept. No one raises their hand, as far as we can tell, and says, "Isn't this a little ridiculous?" No one poses the question, "Say, isn't that statue just a

³ Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1973), 80-81.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

bunch of wood overlaid with gold?” No one says anything. The ruler gives the order for everyone to do as he says and they, for, I’m sure, a whole host of personal reasons based on preservation, “take a drive” out to Dura to go along in order to get along. Again, this is nothing different from the godless, illogical dictates generated by our humanistic, socialistic secular political/academic class calling for our collective embrace and approval, even though many of us know those dictates are destructive, dangerous, and even deadly to our national welfare.

All of this makes me want to ask some practical questions to those of you in power positions.

- What godless dictates are you being pressured to embrace and communicate?
- Why haven’t you opposed a full-court press to move away from what you know is true and right?
- How have you slowed down the advance of darkness?
- What questions do you need to ask to point out the inherent weaknesses of those who want you to sideline natural law, belief in God, and the teachings of Christianity?

In order for tyranny to be held at bay, Christians are going to need to be bolder, braver, and more articulate. C. S. Lewis gives us our marching orders with great precision,

As Christians we are tempted to make unnecessary concessions to those outside the Faith. We give into much . . . there comes a time when we must show that we disagree. We must show our Christian colours, if we are to be true to Jesus Christ. We cannot remain silent or concede everything away.⁵

I couldn’t agree more in this pivotal hour. If we won’t show our Christian colours, darkness will sweep over us like a tsunami, leaving us with a country no one will recognize in twenty-five years, and one which will be highly hostile to the faith.

Our once great Judeo-Christian nation has been overthrown false socialistic ideologies, by class division, by false moral causes like global warming, by denigrating those who hold to Christian morals (viz., they are bigots, xenophobic, intolerant, and so on and so forth) and by the misuse of the judiciary by the State. From the top court to the lower courts, the concern is not for the Constitution or Constitutional law, but what liberal, progressive judges feel is best for the rest of us. The other branches of our government enforce the dictates of the all-powerful judiciary, resulting in new moralities being pushed on the populace regardless of what they believe and what beliefs have enjoyed wide, historical acceptance. Tyranny is most certainly on the rise and from the biggest Fortune 500 companies to the smallest local school, everyone is merely falling in line to embrace and worship concepts which bring about our demise. Such is the educational thrust of Nebuchadnezzar’s ominous idol, and unfortunately, we’re learning how quickly and readily people, *en masse*, fall and worship. We’re also learning how quickly and readily people will, *en masse*, disregard and dismiss Christianity, while opting to illogically

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, Walter Hooper, ed. (Grand Rapids: Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), 262.

embrace other religious belief systems which employ deception, fear, propaganda, and even violence to push their theocratic geo-political agendas. The times smell of Babylon.

Mark well, also, how Nebuchadnezzar motivated the people to go along with his sinister scheme:

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."

Is music a benign force? I think not. Music can create a sense of awe and grandeur. Music can sway the emotions by its well-time crescendos. Music can either create or re-ignite fond, personal, or patriotic memories. Music can bond many people together as they gather. Music can calm us in ways we never imagined. In the 1800s, Frederic Chopin, at the age of ten, frequently played for the Grand Duke of Constantine, the governor of Poland. He suffered from recurring seizures; however, for some reason Chopin's music brought peace and tranquility to his mind and body.

Music can pump people up by getting their adrenaline going. Just watch some concert goers at an AC/DC concert and you will see what I mean. Music can put you into a trancelike state of head-banging euphoria. Music does have the power to mold and shape people either for good or evil. What Nebuchadnezzar did was ingenious.

Years later, Hitler, in Nebuchadnezzarian style established the *Reichsmusikkammer* (Reich Music Chamber) in order to build loyalty to his political exploits among the unsuspecting German masses. In December of 1936, the Hitler Youth Law was formed, making it mandatory for all youth to become part of the new national organization. By 1945, the *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) included the majority of German youth. One key leg of this indoctrination process involved the learning and singing of many songs designed to create allegiance to the Fatherland and Hitler's devilish dogma. Don't think for a moment any of this has been lost on our hard-rocking musical culture. Much music today is cleverly designed to teach and promote behavior which is anything but God-honoring, but the State doesn't mind for where cultural cohesion is compromised they can swoop in and create more rules and regulations for our protection. Nebuchadnezzar was no dummy. No, he was a crafty dictator.

In addition to employing music to control and sway the masses, he also used force. *You either bowed or you burned.* I guess ISIS has taken a page from his ancient pernicious playbook; however, they have been far more creative than this Babylonian ruler bent on world domination. It's only logical. Nothing sharpens the mind more regarding what choice should be made than impending death. Follow me on this. When an out-of-control, self-consumed, unchecked leader starts thinking he has to establish his power-base above all else, especially when he feels compelled to do it because of a religion, people will suffer greatly.

Such was King Nebuchadnezzar's twisted world. He created an outrageous demand, and then threatened people with death should they disagree. How did they respond? When the music played, they hit the collective dirt.

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.

What will you do when our culture calls you to hit the dirt over things which run counter your faith and the Word of God?

Prepare For Some Defiance (Daniel 3:8-12)

We all know what happened next. Three God-fearing Jewish young men, who held tightly to the first two commands of the Ten Commandments, stood while everyone else bowed. Scholars estimate there were some 300,000 people in attendance that day based on the size of Babylon and the empire. This fact helps us understand why the same Chaldeans Daniel rescued twenty-years prior had to inform the king as to the defiance of these three (As a sidelight, don't you find it interesting that those who enjoyed life-giving tolerance were the first ones, when given the opportunity, to show deadly intolerance against the very believers who had previously supported them? Look for more of that reversal in our culture as the sun sets on our Christless, carnal culture). From his regal vantage point, he probably couldn't see them. Hence we read:

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."

Ah, there is it, anti-Semitism in bold relief. These religious Babylonians utterly hated these Jewish young men. They hated their religion. They hated they were given seats of rulership in the kingdom. And, I'm sure, they couldn't wait to turn them into the king for insurrection. Such is the nature of those who oppose Christ and Christianity. They can't wait for the opportunity to put its adherents into the fiery furnace to silence them so they can get on with their misguided, immoral, godless, self-centered lives.

But I don't want to focus on the Chaldeans. I want to focus on the three Jewish young men. They stood strong and true against their culture because they believed in the unchanging, absolute nature of God's Word. They also believed in the God their names described. *Mishael* knew He was/is really incomparable. *Hananiah* knew He really was/is the compassionate One. *Azariah* knew He really was/is ultimate rescuer. What they knew they acted upon even in the face of death itself. They were not intimidated, no, they were highly motivated to draw a line in the sand and say, "We will not bow to your vain image ... no matter what you do to us." They did not shrink for standing up for God and biblical principles against the backdrop of pagan idolatry.

What will you do where God has placed you? Please, don't ever forget:

Cultural Crucibles Call For Bold Belief

If you don't believe me, then just go study the lives of Martin Luther, or John Calvin, or any of those saints martyred in Aleppo in 2015 by ISIS who were heard saying Jesus' name as they entered His glorious presence at the hands of the new Nebuchadnezzar.

Bold belief. That is what Jesus is looking for.

And just in case you are one who has conveniently forgotten a major message God gave you years ago, then today is the day to be really bold and bow before the feet of the Savior so you can be saved.