

Demonstrate Allegiance
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Daniel 3:1-29

Exodus 20:1,2-6 (ESV) — 1 And God spoke all these words, saying, “You shall have no other gods before me. **4** “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. **5** 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, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

We know those words of the first commandment well. So did Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They didn't just know them; they put their lives on the line to declare their allegiance to the one, true, God.

If we summed up this familiar story in Daniel three we might put it in these words: No other gods, no matter what. In their case the “what” meant a fiery execution.

We know the story well but let's review how we got to four men in a fire:

- King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold plated statue ninety feet tall.
- Every government official was to come to the dedication and bow.
- *“When you hear the music, bow to the ground and worship the statue.”*
- *“Refuse and you'll immediately be thrown into that blazing furnace.”*
- Verse 8: *“But some of the astrologers went to the king and informed...”*
- It was professional jealousy and religious persecution combined!
- *“These three Jews whom you put in charge, refuse to bow. Sic 'em King!”*
- Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage. Ego and insecurity became blind fury!
- *“Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? I'll give you one last chance. If you refuse, it's into the flames and 'what god will be able rescue you from my power?”*
- The translation of verse 16 is a bit awkward. The three Hebrews with no hesitation reply: “...we have no need to answer you in this matter.”ⁱ
- We might paraphrase them: *“There is no debate, no discussion.”*
- Verses 17 and 18 are the key verses in the story:

Daniel 3:17–18 (ESV) — 17 If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **18** But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

- No other gods, no matter what.
- They wouldn't “bend or bow” so they would burn, or so the king thought!

- We know how the story and the song end.
- More rage from the king. *“Stoke up the fire seven times hotter! Tie them up clothes and all and throw them into that furnace NOW.”*
- Hotter fire would have meant less torture, but the king was distracted.
- The strong soldiers who threw them in were instantly incinerated.
- At this point the king got a lesson in theology. *“Didn’t we throw three men into that furnace? I see four and that fourth ‘looks like a god!’”*
- The king edges as close as he dared to yell for the three to come out.
- No burned clothes, no singed hair; they didn’t even smell like smoke!
- Verse 28 marks a dramatic change in this erratic king. The psychotic pagan king’s emotional rollercoaster crests another hill with these words:

Daniel 3:28 (ESV) — 28 ...“Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

- Time for a NEW decree from the king of new decrees: *“Nobody better speak a word against their God or you’ll be torn limb, from limb.”*
- He wasn’t bowing to God, He was just impressed by God’s power.
- Then I wonder if the king said, *“I knew it was a good idea to make these three officials in my government! See how smart I am?”*
- No other gods, no matter what.
- Let’s talk about idolatry: placing anything or anyone over God.
- We admire the courage of these three Hebrews but look at their faith!
- Someone might say, *“They knew God would make them fireproof!”* Is that what the text says? What DOES it say in verse 18? Who would read it?
- Clearly they knew there was no guarantee they wouldn’t suffer and die.
- What gave them such courage? Who would read verse 17?
- In our twenty-first century western world it’s unlikely anyone will make us renounce our faith or face death. We definitely know it happens in other places but when is the last time you heard about it happening in Georgia?
- I read stories of martyrs and wonder if I would have such courage and faith? It would only come supernaturally from true faith in God to deliver even if deliverance came after a painful transition into His presence.
- How is this text most likely to apply to you and me?
- The temptation to give into idolatry comes from either threat or seduction.
- If not losing our very life, what are other threats of what we might lose?
- Verse 15: The king threatened them: *“What god can deliver you from me?”*
- Those are really the words of Satan. He said them to Jesus (Mt. 4:6) and he whispers them to all of us: *“Will God really deliver you? Are you sure?”*
- What if I lose my job, my money, my friends, or my reputation?
- Is God powerful enough to either preserve or replace what’s at risk?
- Another lesson: God could have put out the fire or made the king drop dead before they were thrown in. Why do you think he allowed them to be thrown in? Why do you think he put a “fourth man” in the fire? Who might have been that “fourth man” that looked like a god?

- God doesn't promise life with no "fiery trials." Quite the opposite.
- God's promise to Israel in Isaiah is also His promise to followers of Christ: **Isaiah 43:2 (ESV) — 2** When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.
- Let's shift from threats to seduction. We don't hear any stories of people bowing to 90-foot statues. What are some of the subtle forms of idolatry we might be tempted to engage in? What might we place ahead of God?
- One commentator writes: *"As John Calvin has provocatively charged, the human mind is a "factory of idols." We are constantly, even as Christians, in a struggle with this temptation. The temptation can come from a variety of sources, not all of which seem so bad on the surface of it. Our addictions can make pleasure an idol, so that all our efforts and thoughts are directed toward where we will get our next high...We might seek power in order to control our world...We may make relationships, or one particular relationship, an idol. We may be gearing our life and decisions not around what we understand to be God's will, but rather the will of a spouse, a child, or a friend. Seeking knowledge or degrees...[careers] these too may become idols. The list is vast...the danger is so real. The seduction is subtle, which is why we can slip so easily into idol worship."*ⁱⁱ
- The cartoon character Pogo said, *"We have met the enemy and it is us."* Maybe I have met my idol and it is ME!
- The philosopher Frederick Nietzsche proposed killing God and putting himself in God's place. He wrote: *"...how could I endure not to be a god! Hence there are no gods."*ⁱⁱⁱ
- Sometimes our idol is self. What we think of as "self-help" or "self-actualization" can become self-worship; living for ME instead of worshipping God. Jesus commanded: Deny yourself.
- Anything or anyone (including self) I place ahead of God is an idol.
- Bill Bright and Campus Crusade *"...used a catchy metaphor to get people to think about what is acting as a god in their lives by inquiring, "Who is on the throne of your life?" If it is not the true God of the Bible, he suggests, then it is an idol."*^{iv}
- Other thoughts?

So, What's the Takeaway?

- No other gods, no matter what.
- We may never be threatened with losing our physical life by execution. Our greater temptation is to risk losing God's blessings by putting anything or anyone in first place ahead of Him.
- What are the warning signs of possible idolatry?
 - Does it cause me to disobey the clear commands of scripture?
 - Am I more excited about my potential idol than I am about Christ?
 - Do I have lots of time for IT but never any time for Christ?
 - Am I willing to deny or downplay my relationship with Christ if it might cause me to lose my potential idol?

- What did Jesus say?

Matthew 22:37–38 (ESV) — 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. **38** This is the great and first commandment.

Luke 9:23–26 (ESV) — 23 And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. **24** For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. **25** For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? **26** For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

- The question we all must ask is: “*Who or what is on the throne of MY life?*”
- No other gods, no matter what

ⁱ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Da 3:16). Wheaton, IL:

ⁱⁱ 26 Longman, Tremper . Daniel (The NIV Application Commentary) (p. 109). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid* (p. 110).

^{iv} *ibid* (p. 107).