

Faith under Fire

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[0 : 00] King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth 6 cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent together the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counsellors, 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.

Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counsellors, 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. And the herald proclaimed aloud, You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 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.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. 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 worshipped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

[1 : 26] Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O King, live forever.

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. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace.

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.

Then Nebuchadnezzar, in furious rage, commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?

Now, if you are ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good.

[2 : 39] But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

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. 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.

Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.

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. And these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning, fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning, fiery furnace.

[4 : 04] Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?

They answered and said to the king, True, O King. He answered and said, But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt.

And the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning, fiery furnace. He declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here.

And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not any power of the bodies of those men.

The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, 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.

[5 : 20] Therefore, I make a decree, any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins.

For there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. This is the word of the Lord.

What a wonderful, exciting chapter, isn't it? And you'll find an outline of my talk inside your bulletins, if that will help you to follow a little bit. Where is God when you need him?

You remember last week, that was our question, the key question of Daniel chapter 2. And as we learn from Daniel chapter 2, the God of the Bible is the God who always comes through.

In ancient Babylon, they believed in lots of gods. Nebuchadnezzar worshipped Marduk, Nabu, Shemash, and a whole host of other gods. And by all accounts, he was a very devout man, very prayerful, very pious, constantly vigilant about maintaining the shrines.

[6 : 25] But last week, when the gods of the Babylonians failed them, Daniel's God came through. Just in case you've forgotten or you weren't here, Daniel was able to tell the king both his dream and its interpretation.

Something the other Babylonian wise men admitted could only have come from the gods. And so because Daniel's God came through, the king didn't destroy all the wise men of Babylon.

The point is, Daniel's God is the only God we can trust, the only God we should honor and worship, the only God who saves. And basically, Daniel chapter 3 has exactly the same point.

Except that this week, everything gets sort of ratcheted up a notch. You know, hence, if you've got an outline in front of you, you'll say, I think it's a case of out of the frying pan and into the fire this week.

Daniel and his friends have escaped one bad situation, only seemingly to be in danger of something far worse. And arguably, or sort of maybe ironically, I don't know if that's the right way to describe it, but it's precisely the dream that God gave Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation that seems to have created the problem that Daniel's friends find themselves in this week.

[7 : 44] And because you remember the dream last week that Nebuchadnezzar had, it was all about an image, right? Or an icon, a great big statue with a golden head, a silver chest and arms, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, and its feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

And this statue was supposed to represent the four kingdoms or empires, starting with Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom. That was the head of gold, the Babylonian empire. And then after the Babylonians would arise an inferior kingdom, a kingdom of silver, probably referring to the Persian empire.

And then the Greeks were the kingdom of bronze, and then the Romans finally were the kingdom of iron. So presumably, not forgetting about last week's chapter, I think we're supposed to connect the dots between chapter 2 and chapter 3.

It certainly looks like Nebuchadnezzar has got this whole idea for a grand statue from the dream that the Lord gave him. But of course, what is so striking about this statue in chapter 3 is that he builds the whole thing out of gold.

Right? Not just the head. And you see what this means. I mean, I think it means, we're not explicitly told, but I think it means that Nebuchadnezzar is stubbornly resisting the future God revealed to him.

[9 : 02] Right? He wants his kingdom to last forever. Actually, that's just what he prayed to Shemash. Again, if you remember, this is slightly an obscure detail from last week's sermon, but in the prayer he prayed to his God Shemash at the dedication of his temple, Nebuchadnezzar prayed, Grant me a long life, a firm throne.

May my reign last forever. That's what Nebuchadnezzar was all about. Now, Daniel's God may have different plans, but Nebuchadnezzar isn't just going to take them lying down.

So I think here what we see is Nebuchadnezzar trying to establish his vision for a different future. And perhaps with the help of his gods, the Babylonian empire could become the head, the chest, the middle, and the legs of world history.

And maybe, I don't know, maybe they might even be able to kick away that pesky stone when it arrives. But basically, you see, Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue symbolizes his eternal reign. His empire will not be overcome by any inferior empires following it. He wants to be the author of his own destiny.

[10 : 19] And he doesn't believe in a sovereign God ruling all things. He thinks Daniel's God, you know, maybe great, but he's just one of many.

And he is determined not to let the plans of some foreign God dictate his kingdom. So he sets up this golden statue. And it's about 27 meters high, if you're not familiar with cubits.

Just for reference, the central tower of the Forgan Smith building, UQ, is about 23 meters high. So this is higher than that.

You know, it's an absolutely massive structure. And he set it up on the plain of Jura, which is just south of Babylon. And then in verse 2, the king calls together all the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magicians.

It sounds like King Caractacus, doesn't it? And I think it is meant to sound a little bit hilarious. And all the officials of the provinces, they come to the dedication of this image. Later on, when the herald speaks, he proclaimed aloud, you are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, the trigon, the harp, the bagpipe, and every kind of music, you're to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

[11 : 41] Again, I think all this repetition is meant to sound a little bit ridiculous. The point is that Nebuchadnezzar wants unity from the top to the bottom of the society and across every nation and culture within his empire.

And he wants his statue to be universally worshipped. Falling down and worshipping the statue is really a symbol of allegiance to him and the kingdom he is building.

I can't help but think of the cult of the Caesars in Rome or of the Nazi party in more recent times. You know, that kind of, the pressure to conform, the propaganda that these regimes are engaged in to try and rally people to their cause.

This is what Nebuchadnezzar is doing. And I don't know if this is there, but yeah, there's this well-known photograph, I don't know if you've seen this one, taken in 1936 at the launch of a new German navy vessel by the men who, you know, it's a photograph of the men who just built it. And notice, everyone is giving the Nazi salute. Except for this one man in the middle with his arms very conspicuously crossed. Now there's a bit of debate about exactly who that guy was, but for our purposes this morning it doesn't really matter.

[12 : 57] But whoever he was, you can imagine the kind of conviction that that would take. You know, the kind of courage that would take. Surrounded by all your colleagues in unison, performing the same gesture, reciting the same slogan, a powerful symbol of strength and unity.

And of course, if you don't salute, you are the chink in the armor of that German strength. You are the pathogen in the blood of German society.

The germ in Germany. I'm so sorry. It just came to me. I thought it was hilarious. Slightly distracting from the seriousness of the moment.

Let's just rein it in, Russell. Dangerous, hostile, an enemy. So, when you stand out in this way, you don't belong. You're not welcome.

You're undermining everything we're trying to do here. You know, you're not a team player. So, of course, just as it was in 1930s Germany, there were brutal punishments designed to crack down on dissidents.

[14:12] Nebuchadnezzar's threat was a burning, fiery furnace. And notice the therefore in verse 7. The therefore. As soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, the pipe, the lyre, etc., they fell down and worshipped the golden image.

Of course, they did. You know, the point is not that this was not heartfelt obedience. This was coerced obedience. Everyone did it on pain of death.

You know, some of them may or may not have been true believers, but it wasn't really about that. Fear is a more reliable tool than love, as Machiavelli would say. Except, of course, Nebuchadnezzar's tactics didn't work out on these three conscientious objectors, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

In verse 8, certain Chaldeans came forward as stool pigeons or informants.

Now, this section of Daniel is written in Aramaic, by the way, and I can't read Aramaic, so, but in one of the footnotes, I noticed this, that literally the phrase in verse 8, what the Chaldeans did to the Jews here is, they ate the pieces of them.

[15:24] They ate the pieces of them. Isn't that a vivid idiom? We might say they tore the shreds off them, or something like that. You know, we're not told exactly why they started taking bites out of the Jews.

You know, perhaps it was nationalism, or wanting to curry favor with the king, jealousy. We'll see that come up later as a motive in the book.

And remember, at the end of chapter 2, at Daniel's request, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all got promoted to positions of great influence. that would be, you can imagine, it wouldn't be too surprising if that ruffled a few feathers.

The Chaldeans were the kind of ruling class, the elite. Those were positions for them. You know, for the Oxford and Etonian boys. Perhaps it was a combination of all of the above.

But whatever the case, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego end up getting hauled before the king. And they get asked two questions. The interrogation begins in verse 14. Nebuchadnezzar says, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?

[16:38] Now, you notice how, in question one, it's interesting how Nebuchadnezzar ties together the serving of the Babylonian gods with worshipping the golden image. It's not too surprising, but it's worth noticing how false religions and governments are always in cahoots together.

In the book of Revelation, you remember how the beast and the false prophet always work together. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't want his statue to be worshipped exclusively. In fact, he wants his people to be worshipping the other gods as well.

It's very important to him. As we've already seen, he was a very religious man who put in a lot of work to build the shrines to the other gods. So, he's trying to unify the nation, not just politically around the government, but also unify them religiously around the Babylonian gods.

So, Nebuchadnezzar's first question is, is it true that you won't serve my gods or worship my golden image? The second question is at the end of verse 15, after going over the plan again, Nebuchadnezzar asks, and the fiery punishment, Nebuchadnezzar asks, and who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?

Of course, it's a rhetorical question and what he means is, there is no such god. If you don't worship the statue, no one's going to save you. The cavalry are not coming.

[18:01] Who's going to stop me? I'm going to do whatever I want to you. So, in verse 16, the boys respond, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

Which, at first, I think, sounds kind of strange because they go on to answer him. But I think what they mean is, they're not saying they're not going to talk. They don't mean they're going to remain silent. But they mean, we're not going to defend ourselves to you.

We're not going to provide a defense, an answer. They're not going to try and persuade the king or reason with the king or argue with him. They will not be negotiating or bargaining.

If the king has his settled position, and they have theirs too. So, it's a response of calmness and finality and courage without disrespect.

They're not trying to be rude, but in verse 17, they say, if this be so, in other words, if that's what you want to do, then our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace. [19:10] And he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 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. So, they answer the second question first and then the first question second.

I love these two verses because they're just so clear about what faith is, aren't they, right? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not presuming on God's deliverance, even though they sort of seem to suggest that this is just typical of God.

You know, they say, he will deliver us. God is the God of deliverance. They do express some confidence in that. But because they have no definite promise, they're not being presumptuous. You know, faith and presumption, not the same thing. But they know two things. Number one, that God is able to deliver them out of Nebuchadnezzar's hand. And number two, that even if he doesn't, they must worship God alone.

And let's just slow down and think about this for a moment because I think this really is the heart of our passage this morning. The first thing to say is that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are keeping the law here, aren't they?

[20:16] Think about it. Yahweh, the God of the Bible, demands absolutely exclusive allegiance. That is commandment number one. You shall have no other gods before me.

That is the first commandment of the old covenant. And of course, it's precisely because Israel failed to do this that they got sent into exile in the first place.

But how did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego obey the law? And when they were under so much pressure not to? The answer is faith, you see.

The answer is faith. They trust God as the God who always comes through. That is always the essence of a right relationship with God.

Faith is what God counts as righteousness. Faith is what pleases God and without faith it is impossible to please the Lord. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego here are acting in total reliance upon God and that's why they're able to keep His law.

[21:24] Which of course is exactly what we get taught then in the New Testament that the right approach to the law has never been legalism or kind of law keeping in our own strength, you know, reliance on ourselves and our law keeping abilities so that we can establish our own works righteousness or something like that.

Actually, God detests that kind of law keeping. It's wickedness to Him. The right approach to the law is faith. And faith strengthens us because faith frees us from our fears, fear of other people, fear of kings, fear of pain and death.

Because God is bigger and stronger than anything the world can throw at us. So faith is what enables us to stand in the day of testing, to please God and honor God and we're put under pressure.

Now, in verse 19 then, in the face of the calmness of these boys or men, Nebuchadnezzar loses his temper again. The fire becomes, I think, a bit of a metaphor or a kind of expression of his temper, I think.

Daniel says, he was filled with fury and the expression of his face changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated, which presumably is a sort of idiomatic way of saying it was heated as hot as it could possibly get.

[22:52] Nebuchadnezzar was a man used to getting his own way, which of course is the Bible's definition of sin. And we all love getting our own way, don't we? This is what sin does to people.

It makes us hate one another. It makes us rage with fury. Nebuchadnezzar could not keep his cool. And in verse 22, notice, because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, which again is just typical, isn't it?

Sin always has unintended damaging consequences. Nebuchadnezzar is a sinful ruler unable to control himself and therefore doing great damage to the people who serve him, those people whom he is supposed to be caring for.

But of course, the great news in this passage is about those who were delivered from the fire. The miraculous turnaround begins in verse 24. And Nebuchadnezzar rises up in astonishment, which I

think must be an understatement.

But that is the word in verse 24. Can you just imagine his face changing again? You know, the look on his face, the jaw that was clenched begins to drop, the look of confusion on his face when he asks the question in verse 24.

[24 : 25] You know, the Babylonians are very good at their mass. Did we not throw three men into the fire? He can hardly believe his eyes. They answered and said to the king, True, O king.

He answered and said, But I see four men unbound walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt. And the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.

Now, before we all get too excited, what he means by that is an angel. In verse 28, Nebuchadnezzar calls him an angel.

He's not talking about Jesus, the son of God, here. Because son of God language in the Bible can refer to a number of things. And here, clearly, Nebuchadnezzar just means that a powerful spiritual being has appeared in the fire.

One of God's messengers. Or again, if you sort of cross-check this against other passages in the Psalms and so on, you can imagine a sort of heavenly parliament.

[25 : 29] You know, God is the king. He has his heavenly parliament of ministers, his angels, his messengers. This is one of God's ministers. One of God's MPs has come down to rescue Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego at this crucial time.

So Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace. He declared, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here.

And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counsellors gathered together and saw that the fire had not any power over the bodies of those men.

The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, no smell of fire had come upon them. I love the details. Again, don't you, they didn't smell like fire, the hair of their heads was not singed, you can almost picture them walking around them, I picture them walking around them like some, they've just discovered some exotic creature like the platypus or whatever.

You know, what is this? You know, how, I've never seen this before. Most importantly of all though is Nebuchadnezzar's description of them and of their God.

[26 : 50] They are servants and their God is the most high God. And this leads into Nebuchadnezzar's doxology in verse 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.

Therefore, I make a decree, any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses laid in ruins. Nebuchadnezzar loves to do that.

For there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon. As per usual, the punchline in the book of Daniel is a new lesson about God.

Nebuchadnezzar has realized, although he's not getting converted every time he makes one of these realizations, but in many ways he still seems the same, trigger happy, overconfident about these punishments he keeps prescribing, but anyway, he still believes in these other gods.

We might say actually that there are other rulers and authorities, both visible and invisible and so on, but Nebuchadnezzar is saying none of them compare to this God. This God, the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he is the God above all other gods, the most high God, the God of kings.

[28 : 14] Actually, Nebuchadnezzar should have learned his lesson from last week, where he said the same thing. Let me just find it there. Truly, verse 47, truly your God is God of gods and lord of kings.

God is actually the God who sets up kings, in contrast to Nebuchadnezzar who tried to set up this image, his own kingdom. And in particular in verse 29, he says, there is no other God who is able to rescue in this way.

The reason that Nebuchadnezzar praises God in this final section of the chapter is because he is uniquely able to rescue. He is uniquely able to deliver his servants. The God of Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego is the saving God, which of course we know even more clearly from the New Testament.

Our God is the God who is able to save. Even in the most unlikely of circumstances, against seemingly impossible odds, he came down to save us.

And of course he didn't just send one of his angels, this time, for us and for our salvation. But he actually did send his very own son, the unique eternal son of God, our Lord Jesus. Thirdly, then, notice why Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saved.

[29 : 35] In verse 28, it's because they trusted God. Again, the heart of this passage is faith. Salvation is about faith. It always has been. God commands us to trust him.

So trusting him is a matter of obedience. And of course, the whole reason we ought to trust him is because ultimately we cannot save ourselves and he is the God who always comes through. To put it another way, faith is a way of telling the truth about God, that he is trustworthy. Which, again, is why whenever we don't trust him, we are being unrighteous, disobedient, and offensive to him.

We're telling lies about God when we don't trust him. In the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, of course, it was their faith that first got them into trouble, and faith often does that. Not because faith turns us into troublemakers, but because faith in the Most High God inevitably puts us at odds with other people and even governments who don't want to submit to God.

[30 : 50] And when our highest allegiance is to God, that relativizes the control governments can exercise over us, or peer pressure, or our bosses.

And when God promises to come through for his people, even in the face of death, then what threat or punishment can any government or person intimidate us with.

All right, so time to wrap up. Where is God when you need him? I think the big picture message of this chapter is the same as last week. In a way, the whole book of Daniel could be summarized this way. God is the God who comes through.

You could almost summarize the whole Bible that way. God is the God who comes through, isn't he? He makes promises and keeps them. He was there for his people when we need him. He ultimately came to our rescue.

But I think what this chapter adds to last week is that for God's people, things often get worse before they get better. Out of the frying pan and into the fire. When we put our faith in God, we're not promised an easy life.

[31 : 59] Sometimes faith in God causes more trouble. The Lord Jesus, the ultimate faithful Israelite, precisely because of his faithfulness, was a man of sorrows, acquainted with suffering.

He had to go to the cross. And as Jesus sets us free, the devil does not let go of his children without a fight. So like Nebuchadnezzar here, the devil rages and threatens murder for anyone who resists his control.

We should expect those who are still under his control, our friends, our neighbors, even our governments, to slander and malign and threaten us. As we look to the God who comes through, we find the strength to hold on, the strength to be righteous and obedient in times of testing.

I want to finish with the words of 1 Peter, in 1 Peter chapter 3. So if you've got your Bible still open in front of you, come with me to 1 Peter. I haven't put it up on the screen. Hebrews, James, 1 Peter. You remember that Peter is writing to the elect exiles in the dispersion. So his whole letter is framed in this way. In a sense, he is writing to us as the Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego of the new covenant.

[33 : 22] We are the exiles, the new, the exiles 2.0 as it were. Which is why a huge theme in his letter is unjust suffering. And Peter keeps going back and forth between Christ's suffering and ours.

Because he wants us to see Christ as our example and our strength in the midst of our sufferings. So pick it up in chapter 3 verse 13 for instance.

I'm almost tempted to read the whole book because it really is wonderful and extremely relevant all the way through. But I'm just going to read a few snippets. In verse 13 Peter asks, Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them nor be troubled. But in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Yet do it with gentleness and respect. Isn't that just Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego all over? Standing up, gentle, respectful, but unafraid, not cowed.

[34 : 36] Honouring the Lord, in a sense they're clinging to the gospel, that Christ Jesus is Lord, that God in the end will ultimately rule over his kingdom, the kingdom that lasts forever.

They're not prepared to compromise for this temporary king and they're able to give a reason for the hope that is in them. The reason is that God is the God who saves.

It's not a verse particularly about apologetics or anything like that, that you have to explain reasons and so on. Why are you so courageous and unafraid in the face of threats and suffering and pain? Because my God is the God who saves. He'll always come through for me, no matter how bad things get. This is the reason. And jump down to chapter 4 verse 12.

Peter says, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings.

[35 : 42] You may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.

Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for the judgment to begin at the household of God and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Peter wraps up a few of our themes neatly, I think. Don't be surprised at the fiery trial. I mean, I couldn't resist. I don't know if he was thinking about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego when he wrote that. He might have been.

It's possible. He said, don't be surprised. Suffering is to be expected as part of our fellowship with Christ, our union with Christ. And for that reason, we should rejoice in our sufferings because our sufferings are a sign of our union with Christ.

[36 : 53] If we're suffering with Christ, we know that we'll be glorified with him. Those who share in the cross, and actually only those who share in the sufferings of the cross, also get to enjoy the glories of the resurrection.

So rejoice in your sufferings. And in verse 17, Peter wants us to think about the judgment day that has already begun. He sees Christian suffering as part of the judgment day, but ultimately bringing about our salvation.

salvation. It's part of God's process of refining and purifying us to make us ready for the kingdom.

Just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to go into the fire, but we're not burned by it.

So Peter sees Christians not escaping the judgment day exactly, but being protected through it. On the other hand, he's saying, if this is what the righteous experience, if the righteous have to go through this much suffering for their purification, how much suffering do you think God will inflict on those who do not obey the gospel and are not ultimately saved?

He's saying we ought not to bemoan our own sufferings, but count them a privilege and a sign of blessing. The real tragedy the people that we should pity and pray for are those who don't suffer in this life, but in their ungodliness and sinfulness are facing the wrath of God in the next life.

[38 : 25] Therefore, Peter's punchline is in verse 19, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. The truth about God, the most high God, the creator, the author of life, is that he is faithful, he is trustworthy, he is the God who always comes through, so we can entrust ourselves, our lives to God as we look forward to his new creation.

Let's pray. loving Father, we thank you for our glorious Lord Jesus and for his sufferings.

Thank you that in him we have a great example, but not only an example, we have the strength that we need to endure our own sufferings for his name's sake, in union with him, we pray that you help us to keep entrusting ourselves to you, keep looking to him and holding on to the gospel, and after our sufferings we might be exalted and enjoy the glories of the new creation and the resurrection. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.