

• *God's people must stand firm and faithful for a lengthy period*

• *A classic study of 'religion and state'*

Paganism involves state religion

• *The pagan view of religion-and-state is still around! Most of the nations of the world have an imposed ideology*

• *Imposed pluralism*

• *Pre-Christian societies were 'sacred unities'*

• *The king and his court officials were totally dedicated to upholding a non-tolerant, uniform, religion-and state, Babylonian ideology*

Daniel chapter 1 has spoken of the way in which a few individual servants of God survive amidst the paganism of an alien empire. Daniel chapter 2 has given us the story of a vision in which it is made clear that God's people will for a long time have to live in this manner as aliens in pagan kingdoms. There will be lengthy empires in which the people of God must stand firm and faithful.

Now Daniel chapter 3 comes back to the individual again. We have a story in which we see how the worship of the God of Israel is likely to come into conflict with the worship of the gods of pagan rulers. In modern language, Daniel chapter 3 is a classic study of 'religion and state'.

Paganism involves state religion. There is no 'separation of church and state' in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon! The king controls religion and says tyrannically what god is to be worshipped. Religion is part of his state machinery. Nebuchadnezzar builds a god^{□1} and demands that it become the national religion of Babylon. State officials especially must give official and public recognition of Nebuchadnezzar's god^{□2}.

This is the pagan view of religion-and-state. It is still around! Most of the nations of the world have an **imposed** ideology. It may be, 'You're not an Indian if you are not Hindu' (as in the thinking of many in India). It may be, 'Woe betide you, if you are not politically correct' (as in many western nations). It may be, 'Submit to sharia – Moslem law – or suffer the consequences.' The pagan view of ideology is, 'One nation, one ideology. Submit – or else!' It is everywhere. Even countries which think they are 'pluralist' want an imposed 'pluralism' where nothing is absolute except a certain **kind** of pluralism! You are in trouble if you say anything is **absolutely** wrong (since it is an absolute that there are no absolutes!).

Pre-Christian societies were 'sacred unities'. They were held together **compulsorily** by religions determined by the king or government. They often had a central sanctuary or a royal chapel. Nebuchadnezzar chose a place in 'the plain of Dura'. No one knows exactly where it was but it was probably not far from Babylon, somewhere where civic officials could get to it easily. This became Nebuchadnezzar's 'royal chapel'. In pre-Christian and non-Christian societies state occasions are religious occasions. Everyone in the country is expected to be loyal, just as Nebuchadnezzar demanded that everyone in Babylon acknowledge this god of his. Civic officials especially have to attend. Nebuchadnezzar called for the leaders of the land: the governors, the assistant governors, the captains of the soldiers, people who advised the king, keepers of the treasury, judges, rulers and all other officers in his kingdom. He wanted them all to come for a special religious-service for the statue he had set up in the plain of Dura^{□1}. We notice that every kind of civic official had to be there. Absentees will be in trouble. It was a sacred occasion. Babylon was to be a 'sacred unity'. The king and his court officials were totally dedicated to upholding a non-tolerant, uniform, religion-and state, Babylonian ideology.

□1 3:1

□2 3:2

□1 3:3

• *Christians inevitably in trouble in such societies*

State Religion

• *Puts on a good show but does not care much what is really in a person's heart*

• *Ritualistic and ostentatious - 'worship' as a physical act and not much more*

• *Invariably intolerant, and persecutes dissenters*

• *A servant of God survives amidst the persecuting kingdoms of the world by separating the authority of state and the authority of God*

This kind of thing happens in most countries, in one way or another. The more the country has been influenced by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the less it happens. In one way or another it is a common phenomenon. At a national level, globally, true Christian toleration is rare and is only given reluctantly. In such a society any believer in the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is in trouble!

Nebuchadnezzar says **everyone** must conform or face the consequences. Civic officials especially must give public recognition to the state official line on Babylonian ideology. We notice that it is mainly a matter of ritual and pageantry. Nebuchadnezzar does not care very much what is **really** in anyone's heart as long as he takes part. His religion is ritualistic (bowing down), elaborate (a gigantic orchestra). State religion must put on a good show! There is a herald who makes a public proclamation and tells the people how to perform in this public religious ceremony^{□1}. The meeting is very sensational. This kind of state-religion has to be very ritualistic and ostentatious. Nebuchadnezzar has a gigantic orchestra to make the occasion a really good performance! There are musical horns and pipes. There is lyre, trigon, harp, drum. Every instrument they could find, it seems, had to make its contribution^{□2}. At the right moment they had to 'worship'. We notice that this kind of religion regards 'worship' as a physical act and not much more.

State religion is invariably intolerant, and persecutes dissenters. The fiery furnace is ready^{□1}! It has to be this way. Those who want 100 per cent conformity will have to use the threat of violence to get it! Most people will conform because they feel they have no choice. As soon as the people got the signal from the orchestra, they performed the required 'worship'^{□2}! It was not worship 'in spirit and in truth'. Better (they thought) to put up with Nebuchadnezzar's god and perform in the way he wanted than to go into the fiery furnace! Pre-Christian, non-Christian and even inconsistently Christian societies will be persecuting societies to a lesser or greater extent. This is the question the Book of Daniel is setting up for us. How does a servant of God survive amidst the persecuting kingdoms of the world?

Daniel knew the answer. He would render to Nebuchadnezzar the things that were Nebuchadnezzar's and give to God the things that are God's! He would separate the authority of state and the authority of God.

□1 3:4

□2 3:5

□1 3:6

□2 3:7



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