

IN EXILE

"IN THE FIRE OF FIDELITY"

DANIEL 3:1-30

This Week's Core Competency

Faithfulness – I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships. Proverbs 3:3-4

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
Then you will win favor and a good name
in the sight of God and man.*

The challenge of living for God in a hostile environment is not a new one. Daniel and his friends faced this challenge as exiles from Judah two and a half millennia ago. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego) provide us with examples of faithfulness we can follow to remain faithful ourselves.

In chapter one, these four men resolve not to eat food and wine provided by Nebuchadnezzar so they might remain obedient to the law. They propose eating vegetables instead and after they do for ten days, they look healthier and better nourished than any of the other young men who ate the royal food (v. 15). God then honors them by giving them knowledge and understanding far beyond that of the others. On top of that, he enables Daniel to understand all kinds of visions and dreams (v. 17). The four young Hebrews remain faithful to their God, and he remains faithful to them.

In chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream that neither he nor his "magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers" (v. 2) can interpret. When Daniel hears of the king's harsh decree to put them all to death, he petitions the king for time and pleads for mercy from God. When God reveals the dream and its interpretation in a night vision, Daniel is quick to praise his God. When he returns to Nebuchadnezzar he makes one thing perfectly clear to the king: "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain

to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (vv. 27-28). After interpreting the king's dream, Nebuchadnezzar falls prostrate before Daniel and exclaims, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery" (v. 47). And when he gets up, he places Daniel in a high position and lavishes gifts on him.

In chapter three, Daniel's friends find themselves between a rock and a hard place. Unlike the situation they faced in chapter one, this situation is not resolvable through negotiation. Nebuchadnezzar sets up an image outside of the city and in a nutshell, proclaims his subjects must fall down and worship or die in a blazing furnace. They refuse and their reply to the king when given an opportunity to reconsider is a classic expression of faithfulness: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (v. 7-8). One commentator writes: "Here is a pertinent lesson for believers today. Does God have all power? Yes. Is God able to deliver believers from all problems and trials? Yes. But does God deliver believers from all trials? No. God may allow trials to come into the lives of his people to build character or for a number of other reasons (Rom 5). The purpose for trials may not always be understood, but God simply asks that his children trust him—even when it is not easy. As Job, who endured incredible suffering, exclaimed, 'Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him' (Job 13:15). Although God does not guarantee that his followers will never suffer or experience death, he does promise always to be with them. In times of trial the believer's attitude should be that of these young men (3:17-18)" (Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC, 120).

Daniel 3:1-30

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

8 At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! 10 You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon-- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego--who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend

ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. 21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. 22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, 23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, O king."

25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Circle "image" in v. 1.
- * Number the officials listed in v. 3.
- * Circle "blazing furnace" in v. 6.
- * Box "therefore" indicating *result* in v. 7.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 12.
- * Bracket "neither serve" and "nor worship" in v. 12.
- * Underline the question in v. 15.
- * Highlight vv. 17-18.
- * Circle "seven times" in v. 19.
- * Bracket "a son of the gods" in v. 25.
- * Highlight v. 28.

day **2** EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Describe how verses 1-7 set the stage for the plot that unfolds in the following verses.
2. Like every story, this story contains an *inciting incident* that triggers the plot-action that follows. Describe it.
3. Why do you think the astrologers squealed on Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? Explain.
4. Describe how the plot thickens in verses 13-23.
5. Explain the *contrast* in verse 18.
6. The king's attitude toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego changed (v. 19). Explain (cf., v. 15).
7. Like every story, this story has a *climax*, i.e., its most exciting event. Describe it.
8. Who did Nebuchadnezzar understand the fourth man in the furnace to be?
9. Drawing on its *conclusion*, put the point of this story in your own words.
10. **Discussion:** Talk about Shadrach's, Meshach's, and Abednego's view of God.

day 3 **EXAMINE** – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Presumably, events of the story told in Daniel 3:1-30 occur after events of the stories told in Daniel 1-2, but the historical setting of chapter three is not specified as it is in the previous chapters. One commentator explains: "No specific time is given for this incident, and some scholars maintain that it took place long after the events of chap. 2. Yet the position of the chapter in the book, the probability that the king received the idea for the image from the dream in chap. 2, and the likelihood that the image was constructed to test the loyalty of the king's officials to his new administration all appear to support a time nearer the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. The episode did not occur before his second year (603-602 B.C.) however, for it was not until then that Daniel interpreted the dream (cf. 2:1) with the subsequent appointment of the Hebrew young men to their positions as officials 'over the affairs of the province of Babylon' (3:12; cf. 2:49)" (Miller, 108). Daniel does not appear to be present on this occasion; perhaps his responsibilities required him to remain at the palace.

Verses 1-7 set the stage for the unfolding plot that follows. In a bold effort to unite his empire, Nebuchadnezzar erects a massive image "on the plain of Dura" south of Babylon—his idea for the project triggered by the metal Colossus he saw in his puzzling dream. At the dedication, he tells seven different classes of government officials gathered from across the realm, representing different "peoples, nations and men of every language" (v. 4), that they must pledge allegiance to him by falling down and worshipping the image. Those who refuse to do so when they "hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music" (v. 5) are to be incinerated. Naturally, when the music sounds, everyone falls down and worships the golden image, or so the king believes.

Verses 8-12 describe the *inciting incident*, i.e., the event that triggers the plot-action. As far as the king knows, all of his officials pledge allegiance to him, but some of his astrologers or "Chaldeans" (see NIV margin) know better. Apparently the Hebrew term is used here in an ethnic sense to refer to men of Chaldean extraction, anti-Semites of old that resent the king's promotion of foreigners, who tell Nebuchadnezzar of three privileged Jews who choose to ignore the king's decree. Translated literally, these astrologers come forward and "eat the pieces of the Jews," an idiomatic expression that the NIV renders by "denounced the Jews." Their

accusation, expressed in verse 12, clearly flies in the face of the king's former better judgment: "There are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve you gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." Without their denunciation there is no story to tell.

The plot thickens in verses 13-23. Nebuchadnezzar's response is all the Chaldeans could have hoped for; in a fit of rage, he calls for the disloyal three. Justice demands that they not be condemned on hearsay alone, so the king confirms the accusation against them. Then, he *unexpectedly* gives them a chance to recant by worshipping the image he made, but their second chance comes with a stern warning: "But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand" (v. 15). "It was imperative that the great king should not lose face before the magnificent array of international delegates, and he defied any god to deliver them from the hands of his Babylonian Majesty. This shows human pride taken to its logical conclusion, saying 'thou shalt have no other god but me'" (Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, TOTC, 115).

The accused offer no defense; they stand guilty as charged. Instead, they express their confidence in God to save them. The translation of verse 17 can legitimately be worded to suggest that the men questioned God's ability to deliver them (see The NET Bible 30^{tn}; cf., NRSV). But in light of the parallelism with verse 18, the translation in the NIV seems preferable. One commentator explains: "The young men were not voicing any uncertainty as to God's ability, but only as to His willingness. They were not sure that He would choose to deliver them. A paraphrase makes the thought clear: 'If our God can find it possible to deliver us in terms of what He sees best, then he will deliver'" (Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 88). In other words, the Hebrews believed their God *could* but not necessarily that he *would* spare their lives.

Their words provoke a change in the king's countenance. "'His attitude toward them changed' is literally 'the image of his face was changed,' referring to the king's facial expression. His countenance became harsh and flushed with anger" (Miller, 121). He orders that the furnace be made as hot as possible and commands his soldiers to bind Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and drop them

in. The furnace is so hot that the soldiers who carry out his orders are incinerated.

Verses 24-26a describe the *climax* of the story. The king looks into the furnace and sees not *three* men but *four* walking around inside. "He said, 'Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods'" (v.25). On the one hand, his words clearly ascribe deity to the fourth person in the furnace. On the other, since he is a polytheist, he clearly has no concept of the one true God. All he knows is that the fourth figure in the fire appears divine. Understood from a Christian perspective, the fourth person is most likely the second person of the Trinity, the pre-incarnate Christ.

The *conclusion* and *denouement* of the story follows in verses 26b-30. The story winds down quickly following its climax. The three Hebrews come out of the furnace unharmed, without even the smell of fire on them. Nebuchadnezzar praises their God and issues another decree—this time warning that those who speak against the Hebrews' God will be "cut to pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble" (v. 29). In the very end, he promotes Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The point of the story is captured by the king's own words: "They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God" (v. 28). And so should we.

The Message of the Passage

Living in a hostile world unsympathetic to the Christian faith and way of life, God's people must trust him and be willing to give up their lives rather than bow before the world's gods.

day  **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 *living questions* to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living questions*:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **image of gold** The word implies an image in human form (cf., 2:31-35), rather than an ornamental column or pyramidion like the Washington Monument. Overlaid with gold, it must have been a dazzling sight. "Driver proposes that the image was in the likeness of Nebuchadnezzar himself and was a monument to his achievements, but worship of a deity is clearly involved in this command to bow before the statue (cf. 3:28). In some ancient cultures the king was considered divine, but this was not the case in the Babylonian Empire. More plausible is Wiseman's proposal that the image was in the likeness of one of Babylon's gods, probably the principal god, Marduk" (Miller, 112).

v. 1 **ninety and nine** "As much as thirty or forty feet of the height may have been taken up by the base, producing measurement more proportional to a human figure" (110). "If an obelisk ninety feet in height be regarded as improbable, the colossus of Rhodes was higher (70 cubits as opposed to 60). As for the overlaying of images with gold, not only have some examples of this gold-plating been found, but the practice is referred to in Isaiah (40:19; 41:7) and Jeremiah (10:4), and in the writings of Herodotus" (Baldwin, 111).

v. 2 **satraps, prefects . . .** "The 'satraps' were the highest political officials in each province. The 'prefects' (princes) were military chiefs. The 'governors' (captains) were heads of sections of the provinces. The 'counselors' (advisers, judges) were high-ranking judges. The 'treasurers' were superintendents of the treasury. The 'judges' (counselors) were secondary judges, and the 'magistrates' (sheriffs) were lower level legal officials. The 'rulers' (officials) were subordinates of the satraps. These groups represented all the administrative government officials of the wide-ranging empire, and they spoke many different languages (v. 7)" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Daniel, 2017 ed., 50, www.soniclight.com).

v. 6 **blazing furnace** A kiln type furnace with a larger opening at the top through which the men were dropped and a smaller opening at the bottom through which they were viewed. "A huge kiln would necessarily have been available to smelt metal for the gold plating and for manufacturing the bricks to construct the base and possible the inner parts of the statue itself" (Miller, 115). "Judging from bas-reliefs, it would seem that Mesopotamian smelting furnaces tended to be like an old-fashioned glass milk-bottle in shape, with a large opening for the insertion of the ore to be smelted and a smaller aperture at ground level for the admission of wood and charcoal to furnish the heat. There must have been two or more smaller holes at this same level to permit the insertion of pipes connected with large bellows, when it was desired to raise the temperature beyond what the flue or chimney would produce. Undoubtedly the furnace itself was fashioned of very thick adobe, resistant to intense heat. The large upper door was probably raised above the level of the fire bed so that the metal smelted from the ore would spill on the ground in case the crucibles were upset" (Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 7:56).

v. 8 **astrologers** The Aramaic term translated "astrologers" here in the NIV (cf. 2:2, 4, 5, 10) can also be used in an ethnic sense, "Chaldeans" (see NIV margin) or "Babylonians" (TEV). If the term were used in this ethnic sense here, it would suggest that Daniel and his friends were the objects of discrimination—anti-Semitism Babylonian style.

v. 8 **denounced** Literally, "ate the pieces of the Jews," a vivid idiomatic expression meaning, "to condemn" or "to accuse." "'Chewed them out' might be a comparable English idiom, though not as harsh. These astrologers expressed great hostility toward 'the Jews.' Although personal jealousy was likely the primary motive for the astrologers' animosity, anti-Semitism may have been involved" (Miller, 116).

v. 16 **do not need . . .** Not that the three refused to answer the charges against them. Readily admitting that they would neither serve the king's gods nor worship the image he set up, they pleaded "no contest." "The thought is that the three were admitting their 'guilt.' They had 'no need' of answering, because they had nothing to say in the way of denial. They had not bowed to the image" (Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel*, 88).

v. 19 **seven times hotter** I.e., make it as hot as possible. "Heated seven times more is not to be understood literally. The writer is using a proverbial expression (cf. Prov. 24:16; 26:16)" (Baldwin, 117).

v. 25 **son of the gods** A literal translation of the Aramaic phrase is "a son of gods" meaning "a son of deity." The king was speaking as a pagan polytheist who had acknowledged Daniel's God (2:46, 47) but still worshiped Babylon's deities. If the fourth figure were the pre-incarnate Second Person of the Trinity (cf., "the Son of God," KJV), not merely an angel (cf. v. 28), which is possible, Nebuchadnezzar would not have realized it. It seems he "was content to conceive of the fourth figure as a lesser heavenly being sent by the all-powerful God of the Israelites" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on Dan. 3:25).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

I am currently reading an autobiography called *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun*. It's a hard read. The unimaginable persecution that Brother Yun has endured for the gospel of Christ is indescribable. He was repeatedly beaten and imprisoned for sharing Jesus with the Chinese people. Throughout all his suffering, he refused to denounce the name of Christ. He is only alive today because of God's mercy. In a way, he reminds me of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Their physical bodies were put to the ultimate test, too. They could either bow down to the golden idol or die in the furnace. They also received mercy and were spared from certain death. Unlike those young men, Brother Yun's body bears the scars of years of abuse, but he remained faithful. There may be a day when we or our children are faced with similar persecutions because of our relationship with Jesus. It will likely not be as severe as Brother Yun's but it may be hurtful and cause us to feel rejected or experience loss. My prayer is that we will stand firm and be resolute in our faith. May we say with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, "I know God can fix this, but even if he chooses not to, we will not deny him." That kind of faith is built over time and comes when the Lord extends His great mercy to us.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Daniel 3

1. What were the people to do when they heard the music?
2. Why was King Nebuchadnezzar angry in verse 13?
3. What was his response after the men came out of the furnace (v. 28)?

What Do You Think

Read verses 16-18 again. Do you think the men were afraid of the furnace? If so, their faith was bigger than their fear. What are you afraid of if you stand up for your faith?

What R U Going To Do

Think of some bold faith things you can do this week. Maybe you could bow your head and pray at school. Tell someone about Jesus. Ask a teacher how you can pray for her. Remember the fiery furnace this week and be bold!

Core Comp

Faithfulness – I am loyal to God and others, so they know they can count on me.

Memory Verse

Philippians 3:19b-20 – *Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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