

Faith through Fire

God calls us to confidently stand for our convictions by remaining committed to Him in the midst of opposition.



GOD'S STORY
THE TRANSFORMATION FOR ADULT LIFEGROUPS

Daniel 3:1-30

August 23, 2020

(Daniel 3:1-7) ¹ King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits 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, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe 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 nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

(Daniel 3:8-18) ⁸ At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe 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, Your Majesty. 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, pipe 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 him, "King 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 deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

(Daniel 3:19-30) 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, Your Majesty." 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.

COMMUNITY – CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- Would you say you are a confident person? Can you be confident and, at the same time, go with the flow? Explain.
- What is a topic about which you have strong convictions? Have you ever had an opportunity to act on those convictions? Explain.
- Are there ever situations where you start to waver in your convictions? Explain.

Daniel's home country of Judah was captured by Babylon and forced into exile. Daniel lived most of his life cut off from his homeland, his culture, and the free practice of his faith. Despite the hostile environment in which he lived, Daniel refused to give into the temptation to compromise his faith and integrity in order to advance as an employee of the king of Babylon. In doing so, Daniel and his friends paint a faithful picture of what it means to confidently stand for convictions in the midst of opposition.

CONTENT – EXPLORING GOD'S STORY

Have a volunteer read Daniel 3:1-7

- Who did Nebuchadnezzar call on to worship his statue? Why do you think he chose those people?
- What was their motivation for worshipping the golden image?
- What are some culturally accepted or politically driven issues where Christians today might feel pressured to go along with the crowd? What could be their motivation for doing so?

Nebuchadnezzar demanded that people worship what he thought worthy of worship. He built a 90-foot golden statue of, likely, a Babylonian god. He called the leaders in the empire to come and worship the statue, believing that if the leaders worshipped, so would everyone else. They did not worship because they believed in the statue as a god. They worshipped out of fear for their lives. Death by fiery furnace was a strong motivator.

Have a volunteer read Daniel 3:8-18

- Why do you think the Chaldeans told Nebuchadnezzar about the Jews not following?
- Daniel 2:49 says, "Moreover, at Daniel's requests the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court." Why were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego called before the king? How could this have impacted their courage to stand for their convictions?
- Have you been in a similar situation in your career? What happened?
- How would you characterize the response of the 3 Hebrew friends in verses 16-18? What is the relationship between belief and conviction?
- Does conviction automatically result in confidence in the world and commitment to the Lord? Explain.
- How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have courage when facing the furnace? What empowered them to stand with integrity?
- What does the statement, "But even if He does not rescue us" in verse 18 tell you about standing up for your Christian convictions?

The Chaldeans likely told Nebuchadnezzar about the Jews because they wanted to be superior to the Jews in Nebuchadnezzar's empire. Daniel had just been assigned a position in the king's court, and other Jews were becoming influential as well. Some of these Jews were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were put over some affairs of the empire at the request of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar would not like his newly appointed leaders failing to follow orders. However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego courageously stood in their faith because they trusted God and would not worship anyone or anything other than Him. God was greater than their fears, and He is greater than our fears today.

Have a volunteer read Daniel 3:19-30

- **What was Nebuchadnezzar's response to the confident commitment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Do you think it was best for the three Jews that the king did not back off from his threat? Why or why not?**
- **How did God protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Why did He protect them?**
- **What truth can you apply to your own life from verse 25? How does this verse help you in your own threatening environments?**
- **What about when God doesn't intervene in the sense of a physical, earthly rescue? Knowing He doesn't always do that, why should you stand confidently in your convictions with commitment to the Lord?**

Nebuchadnezzar did not care for disobedience and, in his rage, ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. It consumed the men who threw in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God protected the Jews with His power and presence. A fourth person was seen in the furnace with them—this was almost certainly Jesus coming to their aid, even in the Old Testament.

COMMISSION – ENGAGING IN GOD'S STORY

- **To what things of the world are you most tempted to bow? Why? What steps can you take to develop confident conviction that stands firm in the midst of trials and testing?**
- **How can this group pray for you in your confidence, convictions, and commitment to the Lord?**

Daniel 3 reminds us of Jesus' promise to never leave nor forsake us. Because of the cross, we can have courage and hope because we know that Jesus is always with us (Matt. 28:20; Rom. 8:38-39). Because of Jesus we can sing with confidence that there is, "Another in the Fire."

PRAYER: Thank God for the example of believers who have gone before us, facing opposition with confidence, conviction, and commitment. Pray specifically for group members who face situations where they are tempted to compromise their convictions.

CONTINUE TO JOURNEY THROUGH GOD'S STORY

Bible Reading Plan:

DAY 1 – Daniel 5-6
 DAY 2 – Daniel 9-10, 12
 DAY 3 – Ezra 1-2
 DAY 4 – Ezra 3-4
 DAY 5 – Ezra 5-6

KEY VERSE: Daniel 9:9-10

H.E.A.R. Method:

Highlight a verse or two.
 Explain what the text means.
 Apply the verse to your life.
 Respond to God.

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3:1. The events of Daniel 3 probably took place shortly after Daniel explained the king's dream (see Dan 2), although some estimate that it could have been 10 or even 20 years later. Babylonian records indicate that there was a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar during the tenth year of his reign, so this may have led to the king's desire for the loyalty test described here. The gold statue was not likely solid gold but was instead overlaid with it. Nebuchadnezzar probably decked the entire thing in gold to negate the message conveyed by the statue of his dream, wherein only the head was gold and signaled that the Babylonian Empire would only be temporary. The location of the plain of Dura has not been conclusively identified. Daniel was not involved in the events here since he remained in the capital city "at the king's court" (2:49) while other officials—including his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were called to Dura to show their loyalty. Had Daniel been there, he too would have refused to bow to the image.

3:2. The exact meaning of these seven positions is unclear other than that they are listed in descending order of rank.

3:4-5. Three of the instruments mentioned—zither, harp, and drum—are the only Greek words in Daniel. The presence of Greek words does not mean that Daniel was written later in the Greek period. Even Assyrian inscriptions that predate the Babylonian period refer to Greek instruments and musicians. Although some conjecture that the gold statue was of Nebuchadnezzar himself, this is unlikely because the Babylonians did not believe their king was divine. More likely, the image was of a Babylonian god, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's patron Nabu or the chief Babylonian god Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar made this demand as some form of loyalty oath to him personally.

3:6. Incineration in a furnace of blazing fire—a punishment that Nebuchadnezzar had also used on two Judean false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab (Jer 29:22)—was a normal Babylonian penalty as seen in the Code of Hammurabi, Sections 25, 110, and 157. Perhaps this furnace was built to smelt the gold for the image Nebuchadnezzar had made.

3:8. "Chaldeans" is both a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people and, as used here, a specific term for priests who served as astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men in the king's government. Their motive in denouncing the three faithful Jewish men was not devotion to the king's demand but rather a hatred for the Jewish people. Hatred of the Jewish people is often on display in the Bible, as with Haman (Est 3:5-6). It reflects a hatred of the God of Israel and is expressed through oppression and attempted genocide of His people (Ps 83:2-5).

3:17-18. The king offered Daniel's friends a second chance to worship the idol, but they persistently refused. The Aramaic imperfect verb *yeseziv* ("He can rescue") in this context indicates possibility and not certainty. They were saying that God might deliver them or He might choose not to do so. Their faith in God did not rest on the belief that He would perform a miracle, but that their sovereign God could be trusted. They asserted that if God chose not to deliver them from this punishment but instead allowed them to become martyrs for Him, they would still refuse to serve the king's gods or worship the gold statue. This is one of the strongest examples of steadfast faith in the Bible.

3:19. The enraged king gave orders to heat the furnace seven times hotter than was customary, an idiom for "as hot as possible."

3:23. The furnace was built on a small hill or mound with openings at the top and side. So the three men fell into the furnace from the top, and the king was able to see four men in the furnace (v. 25) as he looked in through the side opening.

3:25. The king saw in the furnace a fourth figure who looked like a "son of the gods." This may have been an angel or even a pre-incarnate appearance of God the Son.

3:27. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar and all his government officials saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men. Not only did the fire fail to burn their hair and clothing, but they did not even have the smell of fire on them. Hebrews 11:34 cites this miracle of faith, referring to those who "quenched the raging of fire."

3:28-29. After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were spared, Nebuchadnezzar saw that the God of Israel was greater than all other gods. Even so, he remained a worshiper of many gods, falling short of full devotion of the one and only true God.