

Freedom Way M.B.C.

Bible Study Lesson #625

Date _____

Refusing to Compromise (Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Part 2 of 3)

Biblical Passage: Daniel 3:1-30

Supporting Passage: Exodus 20:1-5

Memory Verses: Daniel 3:17-18

Biblical Truth: God uses circumstances that are out of our control to test our faith.

Context: Like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were Jewish exiles living in Babylon during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign. When the king demanded that all people worship his idol or face certain death by getting thrown in a furnace, the Hebrews refused to back down. Even if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to suffer a horrifying death, they courageously declared that they would not forsake their God and worship idols.

INVESTIGATION

In this story we meet three of the bravest individuals in the Bible. They were ordered to worship the king's idolatrous statue but refused (Ex. 20:1-5). Rather than deny their God, they were willing to burn to death in a flaming furnace.

A number of factors suggest that this incident took place near the start of Nebuchadnezzar's reign: the position of the chapter in the book, the probability that the king received the idea for his statue from the dream in Daniel 2, and the likelihood that the image was intended to test the loyalty of the king's officials to his new government. Daniel's absence is unexplained but may be due to his responsibilities in Babylon (Dan. 2:49), sickness, or some other unknown reason.

IMPORTANCE

In the face of persecution, it is important to believe that The Future is in God's Hands. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to

bow to anyone other than God, and as a result, they faced death in a furnace. But they knew God is the One who ultimately determined their fate. They said, "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 your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Dan. 3:17). These young men stood brave in the face of death because they understood that the future belongs to God.

Truly believing that The Future is in God's Hands will have an incredible impact on the way people live. If this truth moves from head knowledge into their heart's core set of beliefs, it will change the way they value each day and their response to impending death.

INTERPRETATION

Daniel 3:1 King Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.) constructed a huge "image" on a plain outside of Babylon. The gigantic golden statue stood 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide. Presumably the image was in human form. If so, the dimensions seem quite disproportionate, even grotesque. The statue may have been fashioned like a totem pole; or more likely, the height included a large base on which the statue stood. Dura was a name associated with several sites in Babylonia. This Dura must have stood somewhere near the city of Babylon (50 miles south of modern Baghdad). Dazzling in the bright sunlight, the golden colossus must have looked awe-inspiring as it towered over the plain.

Daniel 3:2-3 Nebuchadnezzar assembled rulers from all over his empire to dedicate the colossal statue. These verse list seven different classes of officials, presumably in order of importance: the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, and magistrates. Lesser dignitaries are collectively called "all the other provincial officials."

Daniel 3:4-6 Officials from many nations were present, reflecting Nebuchadnezzar's policy of appointing native rulers to govern the provinces (e.g., Gedaliah of Judah, 2 Kings 25:22-25). A "herald" instructed the throng to bow down and worship the golden image when the king's

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orchestra began to play. Musical instruments in the ensemble included the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and pipes.

Disobeying the king's command led to death by burning in a "blazing furnace." Apparently, the king chose this method of execution because it was horrifying and convenient. A kiln to smelt metal for the statue's gold plating and to make bricks for the base would already be at the site. Jeremiah recorded that Nebuchadnezzar burned to death two men named Zedekiah and Ahab (Jer. 29:22).

Daniel 3:7-8 According to verse 28, bowing before the statue was an act of worship. The image probably bore the likeness of Marduk, Babylon's most famous god. "Some astrologers" informed the king (literally, "denounced the Jews") that three in the vast crowd had disobeyed his order. These wise men were no doubt jealous of the Jews' success (Dan. 6).

Daniel 3:9-12 The astrologers accused Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego of refusing to worship the statue and the king's gods. They pointed out that these disobedient and treasonous individuals were "Jews." Identifying their ethnicity was unnecessary and suggests hostility toward the Jewish people and their religion. Even today God's people sometimes face persecution for unpopular moral stands.

Daniel 3:13-15 Nebuchadnezzar was outraged and demanded to know from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego if the report was really "true." Possibly there had been a mistake. He then offered the Hebrews an opportunity to change their minds, warning that no god could rescue them from his power. This warning likely reflects Nebuchadnezzar's earlier miraculous encounter with Israel's God (Dan. 2). Even such a mighty God could not save them from the fire.

Daniel 3:16-18 The Hebrews refused to back down. They expressed confidence in God's power to deliver them but acknowledged that God does not always miraculously intervene in human affairs. The Hebrews knew that God *could*—not necessarily that He *would*—save their lives. Even if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to suffer a horrifying death, they courageously declared that they would not forsake their God

and worship idols. Their words imply belief in an afterlife (Dan. 12:2-3; Matt. 10:28). *Jr. 14:1-3*

Daniel 3:19-23 At this Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered the furnace heated "seven times hotter" than normal. Several of the king's strongest soldiers were forced to carry out the command so hastily that they did not have time to protect themselves and died from the heat. "Fell into" suggests that the Hebrews were thrown into the furnace through an opening at the top.

Daniel 3:24-27 As Nebuchadnezzar peered into the furnace expecting to see the Hebrews reduced to ashes, he suddenly sprang to his feet in "amazement." Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not dead but walking around in the fire. Moreover, a fourth man who looked like "a son of the gods" had joined them. "Son of the gods" designates a divine being since an offspring of the gods is also a god. The KJV renders this phrase, "the Son of God." Either the NIV or the KJV translation is possible grammatically. Most scholars prefer the NIV reading since Nebuchadnezzar was a pagan with no concept of the Christian Trinity.

Nebuchadnezzar was astonished. Israel's God had once more proven to the king that He was "the God of gods" (Dan. 2:47). When the curious officials examined the three Hebrews, they found no evidence of the fire on them. Neither they nor their clothes had been burned; there was not even the "smell of fire on them."

Daniel 3:28 Nebuchadnezzar praised the Hebrews' God for delivering in such an extraordinary way. "Angel" (literally *messenger*) may denote an ordinary angel or God Himself (Gen. 16:7-13). Verse 25 makes clear that the latter is the case here. Then the king expressed his profound admiration for these men. A courageous faith even impresses unbelievers.

Daniel 3:29 Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree making it a crime to insult Israel's God. The penalty for disobedience was death and destruction of property ("cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble"). Such a command on the lips of a pagan king seems astonishing until we consider the circumstances. Nebuchadnezzar had just witnessed a miracle; the king may have hoped this public display

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would appease the God he had insulted and thus avert divine retaliation.

Daniel 3:30 In this case, faithfulness in trial not only brought honor to God but resulted in rewards for the three Hebrews. The king "promoted" (literally meaning "caused to prosper") Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to greater positions. Daniel 3 illustrates Jesus' words in Matthew 19:26, "With God all things are possible."

IMPLICATIONS

Many adults are fearful about taking a stand for their faith. Yet, Jesus summed up well the message of Daniel 3: "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matt. 16:25--26) Eternal life comes from a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. This prize is worth far more than the temporary pleasures of sin and the temporary avoidance of death by denying Christ.

The life or death decision that these three Hebrews faced is not unique. In the first century, Christians including the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter were martyred for their faith. Today, Christians in places throughout the world are being persecuted and killed on a daily basis for refusing to deny the Lord Jesus Christ. In recent times, missionaries in Iraq, Yemen, and elsewhere have gotten gunned down for their witness. Still, courageous believers willingly pay the ultimate price. They know that whatever it costs to follow Jesus, it costs far more to reject Him. Believers have the indwelling presence of God during this life and an eternal reward in the future.