

DANIEL'S COMPANIONS: PART 2 (3:16-30)

When we left off last week, Nebuchadnezzar had built a massive golden statue of himself and demanded that his entire kingdom bow down and worship before the image or be thrown into a nearby fiery furnace. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow.

And we learned, when you stand UP, you stand OUT. And when you stand out for God, the devil will make sure you face opposition. Verse 8 says, "At that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused" them.



So, what happens now that the king is furious, 300,000 people are staring at them, and Nebuchadnezzar is threatening to burn them alive in a fiery furnace in front of the entire crowd?

That leads us to our first point...

1. Their response to the king.

Daniel 3:16-18 "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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."

It's hard for us to imagine the courage that it took for them to say this to one of the most powerful (and brutal) men on earth at the time. But notice what they were doing in this moment...

- **They're refusing to dispute the Word of God.** They were not being sarcastic when they said, "We have no need to answer you in this matter." They were simply saying, "There's no need to discuss it." If *God* has already spoken on a matter, then *we* don't need to. Their reverence for God outweighed their fear of man.
- **They're confessing their allegiance to God.** They referred to Him as "*our* God whom we serve." If there was ever a time to compromise their commitment to the Lord, this was it! This is the

moment where most people would compromise and say, “I’ll bow on the *outside*, but I’m really standing on the *inside*.” But that’s not an option for these guys!¹

- **They’re acknowledging the power of God.** They said, “Our God is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace.” There was no doubt in their mind that God was capable of miraculously saving them from the fire.
- **They’re trusting the sovereignty of God.** They said, “But even if He doesn’t...” In other words, “It may not be part of God’s sovereign plan to rescue us.” Even though they trusted God’s ability, they also knew that God doesn’t always choose to intervene miraculously. Even though God *could* – it doesn’t mean that he *would* spare their lives.² But they trusted him completely!
- **They’re confident in the grace of God.** “He will deliver us out of your hand.” They knew that regardless of the outcome, God would ultimately “deliver” them because to live is Christ and to die is gain (as Paul said). Because of God’s grace, there is ultimately no bad ending for the believer!
- **They’re unwavering in their commitment to God.** They said, “Let it be known to you O king that we’re not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you’ve set up.” Their commitment to God was immovable regardless of the social pressure or threat of death!

Matthew 10:28 [Jesus said] “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”

So, we see what these young men DID do in this moment. But notice what they DIDN’T do. They didn’t rage against the king, burn buildings, spit in the guard’s faces, riot in the streets, or try to kill the king. They stood firm for God, but they were respectful while doing it.

But the king handled it much differently, which leads us to...

2. The rage of the king.

Daniel 3:19-22 “Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the

¹ Akin, D. L. (2017). *Exalting Jesus in Daniel* (p. 36). Holman Reference.

² Miller, S. R. (1994). *Daniel* (Vol. 18, p. 120). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated.²⁰ 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. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace.²² 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."

When these three men told the king they would never bow to his image, the king was "filled with fury" (lit., *burned up*).³ He is HOT! Verse 19 says "the expression of his face was changed," which means his face was distorted from anger and frustration.⁴ He could not believe that they would defy him in front of *all* his government leaders.

So, he demanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter, which made no sense. If you want to make someone suffer, you *decrease* the heat so they suffer longer. And because the king's command was so "urgent" the soldiers didn't have time to protect themselves from the fire. So, these elite soldiers died for no reason because of the king's pride.

But this is how an egotistical maniac like Nebuchadnezzar operates...

- If one of his wise men can't tell him his dream, he'll kill them *all*.
- And he doesn't just *kill* a person – he tears them limb from limb, murders their entire family and reduces their house to ashes.
- And the furnace couldn't simply be hot enough to kill them – it had to be as hot as it could possibly be.
- And, not just *anyone* could throw these men into the furnace. No, it had to be the strongest, bravest men in the kingdom.

But none of these things would cause these guys to cower down in the face of death and persecution. And that leads us to...

3. The rescue of Daniel's friends.

Daniel 3:23-27 "And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace."²⁴ 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

³ Smith, J. E. (1992). *The Major Prophets* (Da 3:13–18). Joplin, MO: College Press.

⁴ Gesenius, W., & Tregelles, S. P. (2003). *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* (p. 839). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

answered and said to the king, "True, O king."²⁵ 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."²⁶ 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!" Then [they] came out from the fire.²⁷ And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over 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."

These three men were living examples of God's promise through Isaiah...

Isaiah 43:2 "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."

Nebuchadnezzar said, "I see four men in the fire and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." In fact, it was *the* Son of God – a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus (Christophany or Theophany).

When the Bible calls Jesus "Immanuel" (God with us); that isn't just referring to His birth that we celebrate on Christmas. Jesus has *always* been Immanuel, God with us:

- Walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day.
- Wrestling with Jacob in Genesis 32.
- Standing as the Captain of the Lord's army in Joshua 5.
- Speaking with Gideon under the tree in Judges 6.⁵

Jesus is Immanuel – God with us – and He was with these young men *unbound* and *unharm*ed by the flames. *They* didn't die – the guards who threw them in did. In fact, the only thing that burned on these boys were the cords that bound them. The king said, "I see four men *unbound*, walking in the fire." And they didn't even smell like smoke!

For the believer, even when we're facing persecution and death, there will be Another with us in the fire!

⁵ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2006). *The MacArthur study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Jos 5:13–15). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

4. The reaction of the king.

Daniel 3:28-30 "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. ²⁹ 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."
³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon."

Nebuchadnezzar couldn't help but admire these young men because of their loyalty to "the Most High God." The king was angered by their *actions*, but he respected their *commitment*.⁶ This kind of immovable faith is inspiring – even to a pagan king!

Illustration: In fact, if you go to the tomb of the martyrs outside of Rome in the catacombs, you'll see what inspired the early church to stand strong in the face of persecution and death. In those catacombs, you'll see painted on the walls above their tombs – a picture of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, and the fourth man in the fire!

In fact, Ben Stuart tells about a trip he took to Rome right out of college, and he got to see those paintings in the catacombs. And, one day the tour guide led his group into an old beautiful church and he showed them the inside of the doorway.

On either side of the door, there was an old round stone that looked like a bowling ball embedded into the wall. And he said, those are weights that were used back in the day in the marketplace to measure out grain as you transacted business.

And as the Roman citizens bought grain, they wanted to "honor the gods" for providing their food. So, they would offer a pinch of incense and say, *Kuria Kaizar*, Caesar is Lord. He said, but the Christian wouldn't do it. They would only say *Kuria Jesu*, Jesus is Lord.

So, the Roman official would take the head of the Christian and smack it against those heavy weights and say, "You want to try that again?" And if

⁶ Miller, S. R. (1994). *Daniel* (Vol. 18, p. 125). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

the Christian continued to refuse, they were beaten and mocked and persecuted because of their allegiance to Christ.

The tour guide said, ultimately the Christians did NOT bow to Rome, but Rome eventually bowed to Christ. And as that church was built, Christians embedded those weights into the wall to remind other believers, "It was the faithfulness of believers who came before you that purchased the right for you to worship in this space." And as you leave, remember, "Now it's your turn."

You see, when the world watches Christians live out this kind of faith – an "even if" kind of faith – it forces them to take Christ more seriously.

So, remember as you leave church tonight, it was the faithfulness of believers who came before you that purchased the right for you to worship in *this* space. And now it's your turn!

Small Groups