

"IF IT BE SO, OUR GOD WHOM
WE SERVE IS ABLE TO DELIVER
US FROM THE FURNACE OF
BLAZING FIRE; AND HE WILL
DELIVER US OUT OF YOUR
HAND, O KING. BUT EVEN IF HE
DOES NOT, LET IT BE KNOWN TO
YOU, O KING, THAT WE ARE NOT
GOING TO SERVE YOUR GODS
OR WORSHIP THE GOLDEN
IMAGE THAT YOU HAVE SET UP."

DANIEL 3:17-18

FAITH

IN SUFFERING

DATE
April 4 & 5

WEEK
1 of 4

OVERVIEW
Daniel 3

KEY VERSES
Daniel 3:17-18

SETTING THE STAGE

Daniel has something for everyone. History. Prophecy. Politics. Friends. Prayers. Lions. Statues. Wild Animals. A fiery furnace. Dreams. Visions. A king who thought he was a cow. Adventure. Escapes. Angels. Demons. Detailed information about ancient history as well as prophecies about the end times. This is one of the most unique books in all of Scripture, not just because of the topics but also the fact that it was written in two languages. Daniel was written in both Aramaic and Hebrew; Chapters 2-7 are written in Aramaic, all the other chapters in Hebrew, thus showing the brilliance and education of Daniel.

Ultimately Daniel is a story of faith. The faith showed by God's people during a very difficult time in their history. Jerusalem had fallen into the hands of Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar was the leader of the Babylonian Empire which included the most powerful army on earth at the time. There were three deportations of God's people leading them into a period of exile which would last for 70 years.

Jews were driven away from their neighborhoods, homes and all with which they were familiar and taken into captivity. The book of Daniel begins with the overthrow of Jerusalem and spans the entire 70 years of exile. We need to remember that history is His Story. Dr. Thomas Constables says, "This was a time in Israel's history similar to the time just before the Exodus. Israel was in captivity. Daniel contains proof of God's sovereignty."¹

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. Circumstances are Heating Up
2. The Choice is Made
3. "Even If" kind of Faith
4. Testimony of Faith

THINGS TO KNOW

- Daniel's Babylonian name was Belteshazzar but we know him by his Hebrew name, Daniel.
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were given Babylonian names when taken into captivity. Their Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

FAITH IN SUFFERING

Setting the Stage, continued >

God is sovereign and always at work for our good and His glory. When all is said and done, it is about His Plan and Our Purpose. The book of Daniel shows the plan of God is not derailed even in the midst of captivity. Daniel and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego live out their purpose in the midst of cultural pressure, vulnerability, and suffering.

As we pick up the story today, Daniel and his friends have already proven their faith to God by making a stand on dietary issues as well as religious issues. Nebuchadnezzar was impressed with what he saw in these four young men, even stating they were 10 times better than all the magicians and conjurers at his disposal (*Daniel 1:20*). This was proven in chapter 2 when King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that no one could interpret; except for Daniel. The dream was kept a mystery from everyone, but Daniel was still able to interpret the dream, thus giving a witness for God (*Daniel 2:10-11, 20-23, 28*).

Introduction

We just completed five weeks in the Story of Promise; looking at how God fulfilled His promise to His people with Joshua and David. David knew personally about the far-reaching promises of God. Perhaps one of the greatest promises in all of Scripture is in Deuteronomy 31:6 “*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*” David, the psalmist says it like this from a very personal perspective.

PSALM 139:8-12 *If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹ If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,” ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to You. (NIV)*

God will always be with us, period. Isaiah 41:10 explains:

ISAIAH 41:10 *Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My victorious right hand. (NLT)*

In the first chapters of Daniel, there is an uncompromising conviction of Daniel and his three friends that was established from the very beginning of their time in Babylon as young teenagers. Nebuchadnezzar was new in his position as king. The Jews were in exile in a foreign land, experiencing foreign food, foreign language, and foreign gods. Daniel and his friends took a stand for God. They determined early to set their hearts to follow God and God alone, without compromise.



¹ Dr. Thomas Constable, www.soniclight.com, *Daniel, Expository Notes*.

The Babylonians were a pluralistic society, which means they worshiped many gods and had many idols. They even worshiped the “heavens” but not to any “god in the heavens” in particular; just the “heavens.” In chapter 2, Daniel mentions the *God of Heaven* five times in this one chapter. And those who read it perhaps understood for the first time there was a *God of Heaven*. Not unlike the time in Acts 17 when Paul preached in Athens to all those who were worshipping the various idols/gods even having one labeled “to the unknown god.” Remember Paul said, “*what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.*” (Acts 17:23) Daniel, in essence, was saying, you have all these little “g” gods. But I believe in, trust in, and have faith in the One True God, the capital “G” God, the *God of Heaven*, who will never leave nor forsake me. Daniel knew the reality that the *God of Heaven* cared about His people on earth, even in the midst of suffering during the exile.

Daniel’s friends also believed in this One True God; the *God of Heaven* who would never leave nor forsake them. This belief is put to the test in chapter 3 for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

1. CIRCUMSTANCES ARE HEATING UP

We have all experienced times in our lives where it feels like the walls are closing in on us. Circumstances beyond our control become overwhelming. The culture of the day seems to be free-falling and spiraling downward. For those who choose to live a Christian lifestyle based on Judeo-Christian Biblical values, it is becoming much more challenging trying to sidestep the landmines. Some would even say the circumstances we are living in are heating up.

This is not unlike what three Jewish young men were facing in Babylon while in captivity.

The king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had built a massive statue of himself that was 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide, which would make it an odd shape that could not be ignored. However, the golden grand statue achieved its purpose in almost daring people not to look in its direction. The king wanted everyone to bow down and worship this statue of himself.

DANIEL 3:1-6 *Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon....³ Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed: “To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language,⁵ that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up.⁶ But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.”*

The winds of leadership were shifting in such a way that everyone was being forced or threatened to stop thinking for themselves and do as told. The people were expected to blindly bow down and worship this grand golden 90-foot statue of King Nebuchadnezzar, or else. It was a blatant threat. There was no room for debate or questions.

The circumstances were heating up for all people, both Babylonians and Jews. It did not matter your background, race, education or socio-economic stature; the mandate and threat were the same. When these sorts of situations occur, there is a choice that has to be made. If you have not already pre-determined how you will respond when circumstances heat up, you are likely to get burned.

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Throughout history, people who believed in and trusted God had to make these pre-determined decisions. Joshua, who led God's people into the Promised Land, stood before all the people and said, "Choose for yourselves this day, whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15; Promise Committed lesson, March 7-8) Gideon had to make that decision when facing the Midianites. David had to make that decision when facing the Philistines, including the giant named Goliath. Daniel and his friends had to make that decision as young teenagers when they were taken from their homes in Jerusalem to live in Babylon.

The instructions were given in such a way that when the people heard music, they were to fall to their knees and bow down to this statue. This included people of all regions and languages.

The king did not care about their background, heritage or beliefs. The king wanted everyone to bow down and worship this statue that he had made of himself.

The devil tempts us to destroy our faith, but God tests us to develop our faith because a faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. ²

For those who believed in God, it was a very real test of their faith. What happens when the circumstances and culture are forcing you to choose whether or not you will bow down to something or someone other than God?

It was not easier back in the days of Daniel compared to the days of Paul, to the days of the Reformation, or even compared to today. Throughout history, over and over again, a choice had to be made to fully and completely trust God alone, or not. Each generation, collectively and individually, has to make a choice on what they will bow down to, or not.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to make a choice for themselves individually; not based on the culture or pressure from the political leadership of the day. These kinds of choices remind us that we are in a very real spiritual battle that goes beyond the temporary elements of the day. The devil tempts us to destroy our faith, but God tests us to develop our faith because a faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. ²

2. THE CHOICE IS MADE

The decree is passed that those who refuse to bow down and worship will be cast into a fiery furnace to their death. Everyone must make their own individual choice. Some made a choice based on their faith, and it was noticed by others that they refused to bow down and worship this statue.

DANIEL 3:12 *There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had administration positions in Babylon. They were respected enough by the king and the governing body based on their skill set to serve the kingdom of Babylon in a capacity of leadership. But now they had made a stand based on their faith in God. Would their choice to stand on their value and belief system cost them severely in suffering and then death? Their faith was being tested. These three men stood tall when everyone else bowed down. ³ Although they were young when they were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon, they had a foundational belief system that persevered in the midst of a changing culture. They were not willing to compromise their faith out of convenience or peer pressure. They made a choice to stand up for God when everyone else was bowing down to a man-made statue.

² Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary; Complete Old Testament*, Colorado Springs, CO; David C. Cook, 2007, p. 1352.

³ Ibid.

In our culture, few if any have had to face this threat of putting our lives on the line if we did not bow down to a statue. However, we have increasingly seen compromises of the Judeo-Christian value system. Whether it is television, movies, music, video games, internet or printed media; there is a distinct slant to having us “bow down” to that which is not based on biblical principles. We too have to make a choice to stand for God based on our faith, regardless of consequences.

Notice that nowhere does it say they had to reject God; they were just to bow down to “other gods.” Babylon was a pluralistic society as is America. They had several thoughts of belief that were connected with multiple false idols. It was not that they minded anyone believing in God; they just did not want you to believe exclusively in the One, true God. In situations like this, no crime is greater than nonconformity, yet that is exactly what God asks of us when the things of the world are arrayed against the things of God (*Romans 12:1-2*).⁴

Read Daniel 3:13-15:

DANIEL 3:13-15 *Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego; then these men were brought before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, very well. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"*

The king gave them a second chance to do it the “right way;” more accurately “his way.” They stood their ground and made one of the greatest declarations of faith recorded.

The king gave them a second chance to do it the “right way;” more accurately “his way.” They stood their ground and made one of the greatest declarations of faith recorded. Obviously, King Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten about the *God of Heaven*. Though it was in chapter 2, years have passed by at this point. It is interesting to note that by his own admission at the end of verse 15, Nebuchadnezzar sees the limits of the “gods” he knows. There may be a “god of rain,” but he cannot deliver you. There may be a “god of nature,” but he cannot deliver you. There may be a “god of this or that,” but he cannot deliver you.

These three did not hesitate in their response to the king.

3. “EVEN IF” KIND OF FAITH

Read Daniel 3:16-18:

DANIEL 3:16-18 *Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

In their response, we see maturity, wisdom, and humility. They did not get into a debate. They were not going to argue with the king, nor were they going to demean the people who had followed his orders and bowed down to worship the statue. They did not organize a picket line. They very simply, with humility, stood their ground as they made a stand for God. They showed great confidence and faith in the *God of Heaven* who promised to never leave nor forsake them.

⁴ Charles Lee Feinberg, *Daniel: The Kingdom of the Lord*. Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1981., p. 44.

Their statement of faith was not dependent on the outcome. Their faith was firm regardless of the outcome. They believed God “could” deliver them; it honestly did not matter to them whether or not God “did” deliver them.

Their statement of faith was not dependent on the outcome.

I love that “even if” statement in verse 18. That is where faith comes in to play. So often people will turn to God in times of trouble and try to bargain with God. “God I will do this for you if you do that for me.” We get caught up in a ‘what is in it for me’ kind of faith. The motivation for these three was not based on their safety, being delivered or even destroying the statue. Their motivation was simply to be obedient in their faith to the *God of Heaven*.

- EVEN IF - God does not give me a job; I will have Faith.
- EVEN IF - God does not give me physical healing; I will have Faith.
- EVEN IF - God does not give me ‘this or that;’ I will have Faith.

We need to have that “*Even If*” kind of faith in an ever-changing culture.

Nebuchadnezzar did not like the response, in fact, in verse 19 we are told: “*he was filled with wrath and his facial expression was altered.*” He was fuming! In fact, he was so outraged he ordered the furnace to be turned up seven times higher than normal. Verse 21 says the three were tied up, fully-clothed, and cast into the furnace to burn to death.

We do not know how many men threw them into the furnace; I would think a minimum of 3, one for each of them. Regardless of how many there were, the fire was so hot it killed them as they threw in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

DANIEL 3:22-23 *For this reason, because the king’s command was urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew (killed) those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. ²³ But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire still tied up.*

Notice God’s protection started before they were thrown into the furnace. The fire was hotter than it had ever been by seven times. The fire was obviously hot enough to kill those trying to throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fire. God’s protection began before they “*fell*” in the fire as it was hot enough to kill; but it did not burn the ropes, it did not burn their clothes, and we are told in verse 23 they were “*still tied up*” when they fell in.

As the king looked into the furnace he saw not three, but four people; the fourth being either an angel or pre-incarnate Christ; the promise fulfilled. God is there in a changing culture, in the time of suffering and when the heat is being turned up in their lives and in ours.

DANIEL 3:24-25 *Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, “Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?” They replied to the king, “Certainly, O king.” ²⁵ He said, “Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!”*

We may not ever see a physical “fourth” person in our midst during times of trials and suffering. But we can be confident that God is present with us through the Holy Spirit (*John 14:16*). Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were confident in the power, authority and protection of God; giving them faith to make a stand rather than bowing down. Their faith turned their test into a testimony.

4. TESTIMONY OF FAITH

Read Daniel 3:26-30:

DANIEL 3:26-30 *Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the midst of the fire.*

²⁷ *The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them.*

²⁸ *Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.*

²⁹ *"Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."*

³⁰ *Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to prosper in the province of Babylon.*

Not only did God protect and save them, but their clothes were not burned, their hair was not singed, and they did not even smell like smoke. I smell like smoke when I simply grill in my backyard.

God wanted to make sure there was no doubt, no other explanation, nor any sort of coincidence involved with this scenario. It was God and God alone. Even the king acknowledged that truth when he called to them, "you servants of the Most High God."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had an eternal perspective rather than a temporary perspective. Their "even if" kind of faith was not based on what God may or may not do in the temporary set of circumstances. Their faith was based solely on who God is, period. Often times we base our faith on immediate results, focusing on the actions of God, rather than the character of God. The faith of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was literally and figuratively tested by fire, resulting in praise, glory and honor to God. In the New Testament, Peter explains this kind of faith as follows:

1 PETER 1:6-9 *In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸ and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*

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HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

In her study on Daniel, Beth Moore writes this about the fiery furnace experience:

We can be delivered **from** the fire and our faith is **built**.

We can be delivered **through** the fire and our faith is **refined**.

We can be delivered **by** the fire and our faith is **perfected**. ⁵ *Continued on page 14 >*

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE *(Continued)*

Notice there is always going to be some sort of fire and it will directly impact our faith. There is never going to be a life with the absence of trials and sufferings. Our challenge is how we prepare for and persevere through those times of testing by fire.

We do not hear anything else about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego after chapter 3, but their faith through the fire has made a lasting impression on eternity. Even King Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged the *God of Heaven*, the Most High God as the only One who could have done this miracle.

The contemporary Christian music group, Mercy Me, has a song called “Even If.” Part of the lyrics read:

It's easy to sing
When there's nothing to bring me down
But what will I say
When I'm held to the flame
Like I am right now

I know You're able and I know You can
Save through the fire with Your mighty hand
But even if You don't
My hope is You alone

Whether it is **from** the fire, **through** the fire, or **by** the fire; let our faith be **built, refined** and **perfected** as a witness and testimony to all who see. God's plan is to be with you every step of the way in every circumstance; Your purpose is to have that “*even if*” kind of faith, where your hope is in God alone, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

⁵ Beth Moore, *Daniel*, Lifeway Press, 2006.