

“STANDING STRONG AGAINST POPULAR DEMANDS”
LESSONS FROM BABYLON 3
Daniel 3:1-7, 8-18,
February 20 & 21, 2021

We’re working our way through the first six chapters of Daniel, and we’ve already seen some great lessons from the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, four Hebrew men who were captives in Babylon during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar. We have seen that it is important to follow God’s guidelines rather than conform to the demands and decrees of human authorities, for God blesses those who seek to follow His ways. We have also seen that God gives us just the right abilities to proclaim Him to those around us as we listen to His voice and seek Him in the situations that seem impossible. God gives us the wisdom we need to boldly lift Him up as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. When we faithfully follow God’s commands, and seek to do His will, He gives us all that we need to prosper, even if we are faced with death threats and possible execution.

Today we look at how we are to remain strong in our faith, even when we are the only ones standing up for what is right and good and godly. Daniel 3 gives us a chance to see how we can be bold witnesses for God, even in extremely difficult situations.

It is some time after Daniel had interpreted King Nebuchadnezzar’s God-given dream about the future nations coming into power. It seems that the dream continued to direct Nebuchadnezzar in much of his thinking. As we recall, that dream had shown an image of a huge statue with a head of gold, and that Daniel had told the king, “*You are the head of gold*” (Dan. 2:38). So the king may have begun to flaunt the fact that God had made him the greatest of all earthly kings.

As a result of that dream, Nebuchadnezzar orders the construction of a gigantic golden statue made entirely of gold. He may have thought “Why am I just the head of gold? I will make an image that is composed completely of gold as a sign of how powerful I really am.” So this statue is over ninety feet high and around nine feet wide, huge in all aspects. It would probably be even taller than the top of the cross that we have here on the top of the church! It’s massive, and the gold it is constructed of would have very easily portrayed the prosperity of the empire of Babylon. Some of that gold would

have been captured from other occupied countries, including Jerusalem, brought back as spoils of war. The statue would have been a symbol of Babylon's vanity and an attempt at establishing a universal religion.

So when the statue was finished and ready for dedication, King Nebuchadnezzar calls for *“all of his officials to come together – the princes, governors, lieutenant governors, commissioners, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the other officials of the provinces...to attend the dedication of the statue”* that he had made (Dan. 3:2). But Daniel was not among the group as he may have been somewhere else in the empire, attending to the affairs of state. Otherwise he would have been listed among the others.

All of the important and rich people of Babylon were there. And when everyone was assembled, *“the herald announced in a loud voice, ‘People of all nations, races, and languages! You will hear the sound of the trumpets, followed by the playing of oboes, lyres, zithers, and harps; and then all the other instruments will join in. As soon as the music starts, you are to bow down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Anyone who does not bow down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.’”* (Dan. 3:4-5)

Now, that was a problem, maybe not to any of the pagan peoples attending the festivities, but it was for those who were of Jewish heritage. There was a law of God strictly prohibiting any worship of any other god except Him. It was written on the stone tablets on the top of Mount Sinai, *“You shall have no other gods before Me* (Exodus 20:3). The king's decree to bow down and worship the statue was in direct conflict to the law of God, and these three men in particular took issue with the command.

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (also known by their Babylonians names, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) had attended the event, being ordered by the king to be there since they were leaders in Babylon. But at this pronouncement of having to bow down and worshipping the statue, they stood true to their faith and suddenly got lock-kneed. They refused to bow to the image, for they honored God's law more than any of the decrees from an earthly king, even the greatest king, Nebuchadnezzar.

D. L. Moody explains it this way: “Remember, no [person] can be true to God and live for Him

without at some time or other being unpopular in this world. Those [people] who try to live for both worlds fail miserably, for at some time or other the collision is sure to come. Would all of us have advised Daniel's three friends to do the right thing at any cost? Aren't there some of us who have so little backbone that we would have counseled these three to just bow down a little, so that no one would notice – to merely bow down, but not to worship?

“When Daniel and his friends first came to Babylon, they perceived that the two worlds – the present world and the world to come – would collide, and they chose the world to come; they chose things unseen. They did not determine for the present time only, but they took their stand immediately. Even if it cost them their lives, what did that matter? It would only hasten them to their glory, and they would receive the greatest reward. They took their stand for God and for the unseen world. The faithful three utterly refused to bend the knee to a god of gold.”¹

But refusal to abide by the king's decree came with a terrible punishment – “*Anyone who does not bow down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace*” (Dan. 3:6). What a predicament. These three leaders in Babylon were expected to follow the king's commands, and yet there they stand, undaunted and undefiled.

Many in that city, in every city of the world, cry out “Give me gold, give me money, and I will do anything.” So many people give their allegiance to whatever is necessary to gaining material riches. And while some today would say that those present at the statue in the plain of Dura should not have bowed down to worship the golden idol, many today are doing just that. Gold has become their god. Money has become their golden image that they worship at any cost. Their mantra today is “Give me gold! Give me gold, and you may have heaven. Give me position, and you may have the world to come. Give me worldly honor, and I will sell out my hopes of heaven. Give me the thirty pieces of silver, and I will give you Christ.” That is the cry of our world today as we put our allegiance to this world over an allegiance to God. (D.L. Moody, *Daniel, Man of God*, pg. 22)

¹ (Dwight L. Moody, *Daniel, Man of God*, [Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, Revised Edition, 2018] pg. 20)

So while everyone else there that day bowed before King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to comply with the command. They knew that following the king's command would be breaking the Law of God, and they refused to let the things of this world become more important than following the Ways of God. The greatest and wealthiest and most powerful of the world were bowing down to worship that golden statue. But not these three. Their backbones stayed strong and their knees remained unbent and they stood there in defiance of the king's order. They were at the festivities of the king, but they would not break their trust in the Lord God Almighty by worshipping the golden idol. These were men after God's own heart. These were the kind of men that God wants as His followers – those who stand up bravely and fearlessly for Him, even in the face of punishment and death. No king could make them abandon their faith in the One True God.

But the question is, how would anyone know that anyone ELSE was NOT bowing down and worshipping the statue? If everyone was bowing down and worshipping the golden statue, how would they know that someone was defying the command by not bowing and worshipping? Who would know if there was anyone NOT doing what the king demanded? Well let's hear what took place next. This is Daniel 3:8-18 (READ Daniel 3:8-18).

Like many of their ancestors who stood up in faith for the Lord God, these three followers of God had enemies who were envious of their position. These enemies were bitter that Jews would be ruling over them, having been lifted up to their position when Daniel interpreted the king's dream. So when the king's musicians play, and while everyone else is "bowing and worshipping," they are looking around to see that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are still standing there. These Babylonians are faking their own worship of the golden statue, and they are spying out the three Jews who have not even bowed down. And since these three young Jews had lived in such a way that made it clear to the rest that they would not worship the golden idol, their enemies were quick to notice and to relish in the thought that they could get rid of them because they refused the king's command. When the commands of the earthly sovereignty came in conflict with the commands of the God of heaven, they boldly

decided that they would stand strong against the popular demands and follow the Lord God. So as the watchers observed what they do, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow. It would have been so easy for these three young Jews to feign obeying the king's command. But they did not pretend that they were anywhere close to worshipping the golden statue. They defiantly stood their ground and stood straight up for their trust and faith in God, and God alone!

So these Babylonians quickly go to Nebuchadnezzar with the report that these three Jewish leaders have not bowed or worshipped the idol that he had set up. Their goal was to get rid of the Hebrews so that they could assume those vacant positions. "It is a very bad state of things when men [and women] try to pull others down in order to obtain their places, but there is a good deal of that in this world today. Many... have had their character blasted and ruined by some [person] who wanted to step into [that] place and position."² It seems to be the most popular tactic in politics and business today, but there is hope when we put our trust in the Lord God.

These informers go quickly to the king with the news, "*Your Majesty has issued an order that as soon as the music starts, everyone is to bow down and worship the gold statue, and that anyone who does not bow down and worship it is to be thrown into a blazing furnace. There are some Jews whom you put in charge of the province of Babylon – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – who are disobeying Your Majesty's orders. They do not worship your god or bow down to the statue you set up*" (Dan. 3:10-12).

"WHAT!" King Nebuchadnezzar may have exploded. "There are people in my kingdom who will not obey my commands! Who are they? What are their names?" "Why, it's those three upstart Jewish slaves you put into authority over us here in the province of Babylon, Your Majesty; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. The music started but they didn't bow. Everyone knows about it, for they weren't shy about disobeying your command. Soon everyone will be thumbing their noses at your commands unless you take action and follow up on your words of punishment."

² (Dwight L. Moody, *Daniel, Man of God*, pg. 24)

The king's anger must have been volcanic at that point. "I want those three brought here in front of me immediately! This is not acceptable!"

And so with gleeful delight, the informants round up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and bring them to the king. And as nice as he can be (yeah, right!), the king offers one more opportunity for the three to comply with his command. "...*is it true that you refuse to worship my god and bow down to the gold statue I have set up?*" (Dan. 3:14). He explains once more what is to be done, just to make sure that they understand the decree and the consequences of not following his command. But he finishes with an important question, "*Do you think there is any god who can save you?*" (3:15)?

At this point, King Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten the God who gave Daniel the ability to tell dreams and interpret them. He has become so full of himself that he dares the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or any god for that matter, to try to protect anyone who will disobey his commands. He has given them the alternative – Do as I say and you will live; disobey me again and die!

Yet, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego will not back down, even before an angry, brutally vicious dictator, with vengeful enemies all around them. They have set their resolve to be faithful to God at whatever cost it may be. They reply, "*Your Majesty, we will not try to defend ourselves. If the God whom we serve is able to save us from the blazing furnace and from your power, then He will. But even if He doesn't, Your Majesty may be sure that we will not worship your god, and we will not bow down to the gold statue that you have set up*" (3:16-18).

They explain to the king in no uncertain terms what their resolve is. They will not be bullied, or threatened, or cajoled, or bribed in any way that will make them turn against the God of the Universe. They stand in front of the king and boldly tell the king that there is nothing that can make them turn from their God, even if it cost them their lives. They don't say that God will save them from the king's anger, but that He is ABLE to deliver them. They believed that God would certainly protect them, but they would not shrink before the anger of the king. They knew that he would surely follow through on his threat, however. They had heard of it before, to many who dared go against him.

This is important for us today to understand. Our God has the power to save us from any threat, from any person. But if He chooses not to intervene in the situation, God will use that model to turn many more toward him as His servants stand up for what is good and right and Godly. These three were not afraid to die at that hands of King Nebuchadnezzar, for they knew that they would immediately be in the presence of the Lord their God. They courageously stood firm in their faith. Oh that there would be men and women today who would be willing to stand up to the tyrants of the world with such courage as what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrated. Just a few people of such courage could turn the world up-side-down for the Lord today. True, they would be labeled fanatics or rabble-rousers, but they would never default on their loyalty to the One and True God. Though they would be advised to just conform to the popular demands of rulers and kings and presidents, these men and women would boldly proclaim the better alternative, and remain faithful to the Lord.

Of course, the king is not used to being spoken to in such a way, so he *“lost his temper, and his face turned red with anger at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So he order his men to heat the furnace seven times hotter than usual. And he commanded the strongest men in his army to tie the three men up and throw them into the blazing furnace”* (Dan. 3:19-20). He would not put up with such rebellion from these three. He would eliminate the possibility of revolution from these foreigners before others began to join in.

So as fast as the furnace could be stoked to the hottest it was ever heated, while the servants of the king tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, even in their shirts, robes, caps, and all (3:21), everything is prepared for the extermination of these three trouble makers and the king watches intently to see these rebels turn to ash. And when the men of the army throw them into the fire all tied up like logs on a fire, the furnace is so hot that even the officers who threw them into the fire are consumed by the heat. It didn't look very promising for the three faithful men. But they remained faithful.

Yet, as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are surrounded by the fire of that blazing furnace, something amazing happens – the king saw not three bodies being consumed by the fire, but four men

walking around in the center of that furnace, fully alive and not harmed one bit. The only thing that had changed was that the bonds that once held them bondage were now burned up. The worst thing that the devil could do to them was to burn up the bonds that held them captive. Remember this, “If Christ is with us, the direst afflictions can only loosen our earthly bonds and set us free to soar higher.”³

At the very moment that the three men were thrown into the fire, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus, saw that three of His true servants were in trouble and leapt down from His place at His Father’s side in heaven to be with them. They had remained loyal to Him, even to the point of death, and He joined them right there in the furnace in order to protect them from harm. Jesus was with His servants, even as they were surrounded by the flames of death. The king notices that “*the fourth is like a son of the gods!*” (Dan. 3:25). The king sees the Savior of the world protecting His own from the fire. It was a fulfillment of Isaiah 43:2, “*When you pass through fire, you will not be burned; the hard trials that come will not hurt you.*” God protected the ones who stood up for Him.

“God can take care of us when we pass through the...fire. God is *able* to take care of us, if only we will stand up for Him. God *will* take care of us, if only we will stand up for Him... [People], honor God, and God will honor you. What you have to do is take your stand upon God’s side. If you have to go against the whole world, take that stand! Dare to do right; dare to be true; dare to be honest. Let the consequences be what they may” (D.L. Moody, *Daniel, Man of God*, pg. 29).

At some point you may have to forfeit your position, your job, even your church, if those in power over you demand you to go against the commands of God. Don’t be afraid to give them up. Stand your ground in Christ alone. Be willing even to face imprisonment or death, because the Lord our God will guard you and protect you. Life here or life in heaven, either way, you win! Be willing to let God use you to conquer even the most powerful in this world, because you stand faithful to Him.

Because these three men stayed faithful to the Lord God, Nebuchadnezzar witnessed His power and protection. (READ Daniel 3:26-29) And when Nebuchadnezzar saw the power of our Awesome

³ (Dwight L. Moody, *Daniel, Man of God*, pg. 27)

God, he quickly conceded that there is no other god but the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. What a witness to the world today, as we also live true to our faith, even as we stand up against the popular demands of our times.

So live true! Stay faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ! All to the glory of God, in the name of our Savior and Lord, Jesus. Amen.