

3 + 1 In the Fire – Companions in the Tough Stuff *Daniel 3:1-30*

Yes. They were there. On the decorated and lavishly prepared *plain of Dura*, just south of the empire's capital.ⁱ A plain crowned with two large mounds, perhaps on one the massively assembled royal orchestra and elevated seating for the emperor and his court. Perhaps on the other, mounted and secured, 90' foot golden image, exquisitely polished, shimmering in the brilliant middle-eastern sun. Off in the distance, on the edge of the plain where the slopes flattened, the smelting furnaces that had refined the gold used to craft the statue.

They were there, among the thousands, blanketing the slopes surrounding the mounds. Thousands, some who had traveled for months from the recently extended borders of Nebuchadnezzar's empire –

- From Memphis and Tahpanhes in Egypt
- From Elath on the tip of the Red Sea
- From Jerusalem and Tyre in Palestine
- From Ebla, Carchmish, Haran to the NW
- From Ninevah and Asshur to the North
- From Ur to the south, Susa to the East, and the emerging southern cities on the Persian Gulf

Nebuchadnezzar's desire was for a most impressive dedicatory celebration, a most impressive moment, to express his bloating pride over his unparalleled power. The moment when, at the arresting sound of sharply sounded horns, shrilling pipes, majestically strung lyres, trigons, and harps, with the piercing shrill of hundreds of bagpipesⁱⁱ – a full panoply of every available musical instrument sounding in a swelling crescendo--EVERYONE on the surrounding slopes WITHOUT EXCEPTION must fall forward, first on their knees, then on their faces. Remaining low until the final note evaporated heavenward, and worshipful silence descended over the crowd.

Yes, they were there. Known among the Hebrews as Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Known in the prestigious central Babylonian district, which they capably administrated, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And when the music exploded through the air, and when the thousands on all the slopes collapsed forward prostrate on their faces, there they **stood**. Not moving a muscle. Erect, shoulders squared, facing (“you’ve got to be kidding!”) the opposite direction. Faces turned east, toward Jerusalem.

There they stood, willing and ready, to die. Why? Why would they do that? Why in the world did they refuse to get in line with everyone else? May I ask you something in this moment?

Does your faith--your resolute faith in Jesus Christ and your commitment to obey His word and honor what He stands for--does it ever bring any *tough stuff into your life*? If and when it does, what happens? Do *you fall* down with the rest to worship what everyone else does...or do you *stand*?

How do you handle the tough stuff your faith creates in your interaction with the world? Here is what your Bible teaches:

**THE GODLY
– those who obey only the Lord Jesus Christ –
pressured to bend in compromise
STAND IN OBEDIENT COURAGE.**

On the one hand, they understand they may be pressured to bend in disobedience, in personal compromise. They get tough stuff of the world’s pressure. Paul told Timothy, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Will be pressured (cf. Daniel 3 (p.739 ESV Bible)).

**#1 PRESSURED to compromise with rival objects
of worship. Daniel 3:1**

3:1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

Reading Daniel’s prophetic book means getting to know Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar. He WAS the man. When Daniel interpreted one of his dreams (cf. 2:47), Nebuchadnezzar was pumped that among the coming empires, he was the “head of gold.” His super-inflated ego translates his pride in personal successes into a demand that his kingdom worship him. Eight stories high, glimmering in sun, a polished gold statue loses its veil. “When the music sounds” comes the command, “Fall down! Worship!!.”

Of course, it is **worship** that concerns Nebuchadnezzar. In Daniel 3:1-18, the word “worship” occurs 10 times, and 9 times the phrase “the image which the king made and set up.” WORSHIP is to ascribe ultimate honor and preference. What is it, who is it that deserves WORSHIP?

That ancient world, like our modern world, loves to move God off center-stage, to put Him in 2nd, 3rd, 4th place or less...and replace him with something considered greater, more immediately important, more worth our time, our spending, attention, effort. Emerson said,

“A person will worship something, have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts, but it will come out. That which dominates our imaginations and our thoughts will determine our lives, and our character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping, we are becoming.”

G.K. Chesterton is attributed with this: *When a man ceases to worship God, he does not worship nothing, he worships anything.*ⁱⁱⁱ

The world has 10,000 substitutes; the godly understand it. Second, the godly are

#2 **PRESSURED to compromise like everybody** **else** Daniel 3:2,4-7

3:2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And **they stood before the image** that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

4 And the herald proclaimed aloud, “You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, 5 that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace.” 7 Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Here’s an important question to answer: What did this 90’ golden statue represent, and why did Nebuchadnezzar insist that *everyone* who had any power or authority or influence ALL fall down and worship it?

- Dr. Leon Wood: “Fall down and worship” – these words were the crucial ones...they confirmed the fears that the 3 men may have had. Nebuchadnezzar was insisting that all bow and worship the image. This would mean a recognition of the false god(s) it represented^{iv}...[the image] stood for the Babylonian religious system, and all who bow before it would be giving their allegiance and worship accordingly.”^v
- C.F. Keil: “...the statue was a symbol of the world-power established *by Nebuchadnezzar*, so that falling down before it was a display of reverence not only to the world-power, but also to its gods.”^{vi}

- John F. Walvoord: “Nebuchadnezzar may have regarded the image representing himself as the embodiment of divine power, and the worship of the image a recognition of his personal power.”^{vii}

So, what was Nebuchadnezzar demanding? He was insisting that everyone WORSHIP...that everyone ascribe to him ultimate honor; to agree and acknowledge that his gods empowering His person and authority were ultimately responsible for His success and His authority. That everyone say, “There’s no one like you, O king. No one!”

But Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego possessed a very different priority.

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Ex. 20:2-6)

THE GODLY – those who obey only the Lord Jesus Christ – pressured to bend in compromise

understand that the world will always want them to worship what they worship; in fact may insist on it.

#3 PRESSURED by others frustrated (and jealous) with your conviction Daniel 3:8-12

3:8-11 Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace.

Keep in mind, of course, that these were the same Chaldeans who were embarrassed by Daniel in the former chapter. The experts who could not do what an Israeli captive (perhaps) not yet 20 could. What’s more, 3 more Jews Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had risen to 3 of the choicest political positions in the kingdom. So, the local talent, these “certain Chaldeans” were having stomach problems...and so they came to jealously press the issue before the puffed-up King.

{12} “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

#4 PRESSURED by the cost others may exact from you Daniel 3:13-15

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O 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 when you

hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good.^[a] But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

Mark this well. The full-of-itself, disregarding-the-true God world will push its own replacement objects of worship, be anxious for everyone to conform, be uncomfortable when you won't, and will make every effort to convince you that *disappointing them will be worse than dishonoring your God.*

2 Timothy 3:12
Indeed, all who desire to live a
godly life in Christ Jesus
will be persecuted
(tough stuff)

On the one hand
GODLY Jesus-followers
are pressured
to bend in compromise

Daniel 3:1-15
2 Timothy 3:12

On the other hand...they chose to **STAND IN OBEDIENT COURAGE.**

**A. STAND...believing that pressure calls for
courage, not conformity 3:16-18**

¹⁶ 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." ^{viii}

What a response! Not in the comfort of a church, but toe-to-toe with someone who can increase the misery of their lives. Dr. Joyce Baldwin reminds us that

Death by burning at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar is recorded in Jeremiah 29:22^{ix}, and in a directive of the ruler Rim Sin (1750 BC) of Larsa, 'Because they threw a young slave into an oven, throw ye a slave into a furnace' (cf. John B. Alexander, 'New Light on the Fiery Furnace,' *JBL*, 69, 1950, pp. 375f.)^x

I think these three men remembered Isaiah's prophetic encouragement:

Isaiah 8:12-13 "... you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread."

Second...they

B. STAND... expecting that courage may intensify the pressure. Daniel 3:19-23

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the 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. 21 Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics,^[e] 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. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

C. STAND...knowing that God Himself joins them in the heat. Daniel 3:24-25

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 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."

"Unbound...walking in the midst of the fire." To his utter amazement, Nebuchadnezzar discovers that there is a God who can set these men free from his unchecked anger. God the Son, before humanly born as Jesus, chose to stand in the fire with these three men. The truth of their courage and faith set them free. SO that in the end, they

D. STAND...knowing that God can use their courage to win the hard of heart Daniel 3:26-30

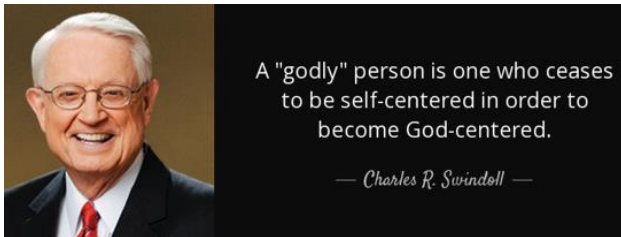
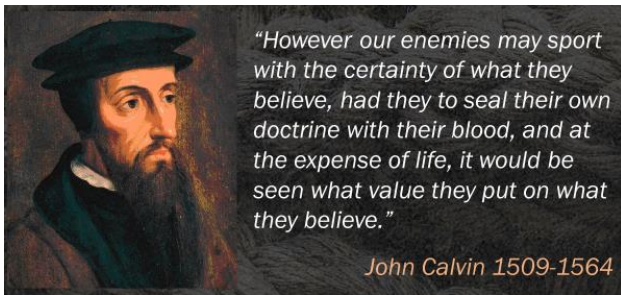
26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. 27 And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's 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.

28 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^[f] 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 discovered, writes Dr. Baldwin, "that his power was far from absolute. He left out of his reckoning *the Most High God.*"^{xi}



John Calvin, the powerful Swiss Reformer, who often sent young men into France to preach the gospel not knowing if they would come back alive, once wrote:



For us today, taking heat for following our great Savior doesn't typically play out in ancient throne rooms or before blast furnaces. The heat, the pressure to worship and give our devotion to things other than the Lord – because everyone else is – plays out in business offices, school hallways and classrooms, neighborhoods, in personal relationships, on the job site. I find it fascinating that in ancient Babylon, on the plain of Dura, there were 3 who hung together...a cord of 3 strands.



Everyone who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus can always have that kind of interwoven strength – Christ himself in you through His Spirit, other companions in Christ, and you.

The pressure will come. Stand in obedient courage.

Jesus is in you. Stand with others. God can do remarkable things when you and I simply decide to stand in obedient courage.

Worldwide, modern Nebuchadnezzars still live, stoking up blast furnaces for Shadrachs, Meshachs and Abed-negos in many places. Modern persecution of Christians is unprecedented.

Samaritan's Purse – "The modern persecution of Christians worldwide is unprecedented in its scope. There are now more persecuted believers in the world than at any time in history."^{xii}

Worldwide modern persecution of Christians is unprecedented

1 Peter 5:9: “Resist the devil, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”

Open Doors USA – “Over 245 million Christians live in places where they experience high levels of persecution. North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Pakistan. Worldwide – 1 in 9 experience high levels of persecution. In 2018, a confirmation of at least 4,300 believers put to death for their faith.”^{xiii}

BBC News – 2019: In some places, Christian persecution is ‘at near genocide levels.’ In Iraq, in 2003, there were 1.5 million Christians; today, less than 120,000.^{xiv}

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ⁱ While the precise location of the *plain of Dura* has never been conclusively determined, a number of scholars suggest this likely location, just a few miles south of ancient Babylon. See Leon Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (Zondervan, 1973), pp.78-80, and C.F. Keil, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Eerdmans, 1976), pp.118-119.

ⁱⁱ Wood, p.83, suggests “this was probably an official royal orchestra. In keeping with the grandeur of the occasion, the members likely were dressed in colorful costume and seated on a raised, decorated stage”

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.chesterton.org/ceases-to-worship/>

^{iv} Wood, 83-84.

^v Wood, 79-80/

^{vi} Keil, 119-120.

^{vii} John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), 81.

^{viii} To my thinking, this response is like unto young David running toward Goliath (cf. 2 Samuel 17:48) when he was taunted by the Philistine warrior. Godly courage doesn't flinch; in charges forth verbally and physically.

^{ix} (Jeremiah 29:22) 'Because of them a curse will be used by all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon, saying, "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire." Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 100.

^x Alexander concludes: Now while the parallel is not exact, in the decree of Rim-Sin as in that of Nebuchadnezzar, a human being is thrown into a furnace as a form of punishment. It may be mere coincidence that the author of Daniel 3 has described a method of punishment actually used by a Babylonian king some 1200 years earlier, but it may be that this practice persisted to much later times and is correctly reflected in the book of Daniel.' Cited in Baldwin, 100, footnote 2.

^{xi} Baldwin, 106.

^{xii} https://www.samaritanspurse.org/our-ministry/samaritans-purse-you-can-provide-relief-to-the-persecuted-church/?utm_source=Ggl&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=m_YGME-N19V&utm_content=Persecuted-LP&gclid=CjwKCAjw8ZHsBRA6EiwA7hw_sTScAyNn_NIB4vrG9vkwTwin33-CHxqncIF2ZmjxiXcqFxlSkPZcRBoCdV4QAvD_BwE

^{xiii} https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/?initcid=19SRP3&initpkg=19SRP3-0&cid=7010b000001kd4CAAQ&pkg=a150b0000045WYBAA2&mwm_id=381106007953&gclid=CjwKCAjw8ZHsBRA6EiwA7hw_sfH5Bb6vX92t5l-gM8uh1B7N_TBZdcqyFQdKLbLcXRPUX-MQjJxqWBoC8DAQAvD_BwE

^{xiv} <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48146305>