



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for April 13, 2008  
Released on Wednesday, April 9, 2008**

**“Holding to Your Faith”**

**Printed Text: Daniel 3:10-13, 16-18, 21, 24-26**

**Background Scripture: Daniel 3**

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 121**

**Daniel 3:10-13**

10 Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image:

**11 And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, *that* he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.**

12 There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Bab’y-lon, Sha’drach, Me’shach, and A-bed’ne-go; these men, O king, have not regarded thee:

they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

**13 Then Neb-u-chad-nez’zar in *his* rage and fury commanded to bring Sha’drach, Me’shach, and Abed’ne-go. Then they brought these men before the king.**

**Daniel 16-18**

16 Sha’drach, Me’shach, and Abed’ne-go, answered and said to the king, O Neb-u-chad-nez’zar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter.

**17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver *us* out of thine hand, O king.**

18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

**Daniel 21 & 24**

**21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.**

24 Then Neb-u-chad-nez’zar the king was astonied, and rose up in haste, *and* spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

**LESSON BACKGROUND**

Last week we learned that Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among the young Jewish nobles who were taken into exile during the early days of Babylonian domination of Judah. Daniel 1:7 notes the change of their names to Shadrach,

Meshach, and Abednego. Following Daniel's lead, they boldly stood out by choosing their own diet over the king's rations. God honored their stance by exalting them in the king's court and kingdom.

The situation changes in Daniel 3. Independent of Daniel's leadership, these young men face a new challenge. King Nebuchadnezzar erected a giant statue approximately 90' high and 9' wide. Bizarre dimensions notwithstanding, this monument to human greatness, like the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, was a farce God's eyes.

In Nebuchadnezzar's eyes, however, this statue played a critical role in the stability of his empire. He had relocated droves of foreigners to his capital city, and it was necessary to keep everyone on the same page. Nebuchadnezzar needed to make it clear that there was only one law, one king, and one empire—and that it all revolved around him. This is why he sent a decree to "people, nations, and languages" that when the king authorized the imperial music to play, they all had to worship the statue (Daniel 3:4, 5).

Failure to comply meant fiery execution. The statue was a symbolic reminder that the Babylonian kingdom was undivided despite its diversity. From an earthly, imperial perspective, it all made perfect sense. But from a godly perspective, it was riddled with problems. In today's text we see how three faithful Jews handled this situation.

### **TODAY'S AIM**

1. Retell the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace.
2. List some challenges that believers face in which they are threatened with harm if they do not go along with popular thinking or behavior.
3. Take a stand against one ungodly law or cultural practice.

### **Their Enemies (Daniel 3:10–13)**

#### **1. Upon what occasion did King Nebuchadnezzar call all the important leaders of his empire? (v. 10) Why?**

Nebuchadnezzar was one of Babylon's most effective kings. Of all the foreign rulers named in the Bible, he and Pharaoh seem to be the most prominent. We saw some of his wisdom last week in his choice of certain young Hebrew men to become part of his administration. Nevertheless, he was a heathen, and there is a great reminder of this in Daniel 3 in the account of his building a huge gold image and requiring everyone to bow before it. There is good reason to infer that it was a statue of himself.

The king called all the important leaders of the empire together for a dedication service for this image (Dan. 3:3-4). When the orchestra began to play, everyone was to fall down and worship the image. There was a penalty attached to these instructions. If someone dared ignore the command, he would be cast into a burning furnace.

#### **2. Of what decree did certain Chaldeans remind the king, and to what level of detail? (vs. 9-11)**

During the dedication service certain Chaldeans approached the king with flattery by saying, "O King, live forever" (v. 9). Then they reminded king Nebuchadnezzar of his decree and recited it to him in great detail. Their first detail was that a decree that he himself had issued. The second detail was that everyone, not just certain people, was to respond to the sound of the orchestra. When they heard the sound of the orchestra, they were to respond by falling down and worshipping the golden image.

The accusers also reminded the king that punishment for not worshipping the image was being cast into the fiery furnace. After they finished giving the king a detailed account of the instructions for the decree, they specifically pointed out the three Hebrew boys whom the king had set over his affairs and accused them of not honoring the decree.

In verse 12, the accusers highlight the fact that the king has set Jews over the affairs of Babylon. The repeated use of these terms suggests that "the locals" are jealous. (We probably see jealousy also in Daniel 6:1-5.) After all, the Babylonian natives have long served loyally, and now these immigrants have been elevated to positions higher than theirs.

### **3. What were the three accusations that the Chaldeans presented to the king? (v. 12)**

The Chaldeans gave three specific accusations against the Hebrew boys. First, they said these Jews showed no regard for the king himself. This amounted to a charge of disloyalty, something that leaders cannot tolerate if they are to be effective. Second, they did not serve the king's gods. This was further proof that these Jews had no respect for the king. The conclusion was a faulty one, but the Chaldeans found it useful in their effort to stir up the king.

Nevertheless, the Jews could not participate in Babylon's idolatry. Deuteronomy 5:7-9 states, "Thou shalt have none other gods before me. Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them." Their refusal to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's gods did not mean they were disrespectful to the king. The third accusation was their actual refusal to bow to the image of gold, as required. When these three accusations were all put together, the result was a vicious attack.

It is clear that the Chaldeans had deep-seated resentment against the Jews and felt the king had made a mistake in trusting these foreigners with such high offices. These accusations by the Chaldeans made it seem as though the Hebrew boys were in total disobedience.

### **The King's Rage (v.13)**

#### **4. In what way did the Chaldeans get the results they wanted? (v. 13)**

The Chaldeans got the results they wanted because the king had reacted with much rage and fury after listening to these accusations. The king immediately demanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego appear before him.

Although Nebuchadnezzar is furious, he does not act rashly. He invites Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in and allows them to explain themselves. He gives them a second chance (Daniel 3:14, 15, not in today's text).

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**5. Have you ever been accused of something by people who had a devious intent or a hidden agenda? How did things turn out? How did you grow as a result?**

To be falsely accused outright is bad enough. To have our actual godly behavior slandered by someone who has a devious intent or a hidden agenda can be worse! In Revelation 12:10, Satan is called "the accuser of our brethren." We remember from the book of Job that Satan's accusation was that Job's godly behavior sprang from wrong motives.

Often the desire is to strike back by accusing the one who accused us or by seeking revenge. Peter has a better right idea: "Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12).

**Their Faithfulness (Daniel 3:16–18)**

**6. What answer did the three Hebrews give the king when he offered them a second chance? (vs. 16, 17)**

After the king heard about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's disloyalty to him, he asked them whether or not what he had been told was true. Without waiting for a response, he told them that he would have the orchestra play again, and if they bowed, they would be spared the prescribed penalty. Otherwise, they were to be thrown into the fiery furnace immediately (vs. 14-15). He did specify that their bowing was to include worship of the image.

This gave these Jewish young men an opportunity to declare their loyalty to God. On the surface it might appear that they were indeed being disrespectful to the king when they said, the phrase *we are not careful to answer thee in this matter* in the antique English of the *King James Version* may sound curious to modern ears. It means something like "there is no need for us to offer a defense of our actions." In short, the three Jews are responding with a firm *no* to the second chance they are being offered. The force of this *no* needs to be felt by Christians today.

We may note that the king's request is not as drastic as it could be since he is not asking these Jews to stop worshiping their own God altogether. He is "merely" asking them to make a certain addition to their worship practice. Is this not the least they can do to pay him respect?

Yet the modern habit of rationalizing questionable practices is nowhere to be found in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They know that the God of Israel is not to be worshiped alongside other gods. God has no equal, and He will not tolerate being treated as such (Deuteronomy 4:35, 39). They knew without a doubt that the God they served was well able to deliver them from a fiery furnace and out of the king's hand of punishment.

**7. What was the perspective of the three men on being delivered or not? (v. 18)**

Although they could not know whether it was God's will to deliver them from the fiery furnace or to allow them to die in it. In the minds of these three men, there was a clear distinction between God's power and God's will. He could deliver them if He chose to do so. On the other hand, if He chose not to deliver them, they would remain loyal to Him anyway.

Although they could not confidently say it was God's will for them to live, they could confidently say they would not waver in their convictions. "Miracle or not; deliverance or captivity; life or death – none of these things factored into their decision. Whatever God did or did not do was up to Him, and they would accept the

outcome. For their part, they had made their stand to obey God's commands as best they knew them.

### **8. How did Nebuchadnezzar engineer what he thought was his worst punishment for the three young men? (vs. 19-20)**

As we read in the previous verses, these three men showed no interest in reconsidering their actions. They were committed to the only true and living God. In verses 19 and 20 (not in today's text) tell us that Nebuchadnezzar will not accept *no* for an answer. So the three are to be executed in a furnace heated to seven times its normal level. Some of the king's strongest men are assigned the task of binding Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

### **Deliverance (Daniel 3:21, 24-26)**

### **9. What was the outcome, and what can we learn from these men? (vs. 21 & 24)**

When the three young Hebrews were tossed into this overheated furnace (fully clothed), unhappily for those doing the tossing, they were instantly killed by the flames. But the three Hebrew victims fell to the bottom of the furnace unharmed. The miracle ended up being an even greater one because of the overheated furnace. The level of heat had no effect on God's servants because He had determined to protect them.

Can you imagine this – the soldiers who threw the young men into the fire were consumed and burned to death and the Hebrew boys fell to the bottom of the furnace and then stood up unharmed, and the king leaped to his feet in astonishment.

In awe, he turned to his counselors and asked, "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" (Dan. 3:24). He reiterated their number and that they had been bound. The counselors answered in the affirmative. Nebuchadnezzar then explained his astonishment by announcing that he saw four men in the furnace, none of them bound, and they were walking around freely without being hurt (v. 25). Furthermore, he said, the fourth one looked to him "like the Son of God."

Nebuchadnezzar then stepped toward the opening of the furnace and called the three young men by name, asking them to come out of the furnace to him (v. 26). When they did so, everyone present realized that the flames of the fire had not harmed them at all. Their hair and clothes were not singed and there was not even the smell of smoke on them. Their ropes were gone, since these represented Nebuchadnezzar's power over them. He had failed, while God had succeeded! When God delivers, He does so in a convincing manner!

Nebuchadnezzar is certainly convinced. He refers to the Jews as *servants of the most high God*. This praise culminates in a royal decree that protects those who worship Israel's God (Daniel 3:29). The point is clear: God is indeed the most high God, and His will always prevails in the end. Those who worship Him alone do so with this ultimate end in sight, regardless of short-term suffering.

### **CONCLUSION**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teach us that it sometimes is necessary to say *no* even when an activity can be rationalized. They could have bowed out of gratitude for the king's generosity to them. They could have bowed to preserve their influential positions in order to use them to do good for other people. They could have bowed for the sake of their witness, lest Jews gain a bad reputation for being uptight, intolerant, narrow-minded, or unpatriotic.

There were many seemingly good reasons why they could have participated in compromising actions under the pretense that they were not affected by them and were not exchanging Israel's God for the gods of Babylon. Yet these Jews knew better. They knew that no action leaves one unaffected, and that one's willingness to compromise means one has already begun worshiping a lesser god. Their ability to say *no* was their witness, and their story continues to be told because they risked it all to remain faithful. The same is true of Daniel—but that's next week's lesson.

### **PRAYER**

Most high God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, please help us to keep strong, and bold stands for You as they did. Teach us be obedient to You, especially when it hurts. Help us to say *no* when our actions would betray You. Convict us when saying *no* is necessary, because we are so skilled in explaining our way out of saying it. Make us like Jesus, whose *no* to Satan's wiles made possible Your yes for us on Calvary's cross. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

True worshipers of God are willing to suffer for saying *no*.

**ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON** – "Faith Without Compromise" Study Daniel 6 in anticipation of next week's lesson.

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