

FAITH UNDER FIRE

Daniel 3

How much suffering will we accept to maintain our testimony in a pagan world?

At what point do we cave in to the pressure?

We live in peace, in comparison with the history of the church.

So. Mexico: believer testified: "Authorities asked if we're evangelicals. We can't deny Christ, so we told them 'yes.' They were put in jail. 2 weeks later they went home. Authorities again beat & kicked them. "They beat us, my shirt was bathed in blood. They told us they'd give us 3 days to get out. 450 Christians left homes to live in refugee camps.

More believers around world are suffering for their faith than ever. *How long before it's us?*

Worst we suffer [most the time] is social pressure by family or friends!

We're not used to suffering for our faith—in any real *physical* sense.

Are we willing to take a stand & suffer for Christ, if it came to that?

Hard question to answer in theory,
while living where it's not demanded.

God gives strength to face such times to people who trust Him.

Pattern of faithfulness doesn't suddenly jump to life when big day comes. These young people are faithful in big test, because they establish pattern of faithfulness in subtle social swampland of daily living

THIRD EXAMPLE:

Faithful ultimately triumph!

What problem do these young people face?

KING'S DECREE 1-7 *"King Nebu. made an image of gold, whose height was 60 cubits & its breadth 6 cubits... ²Then King Nebu. sent to gather the satraps, prefects, & governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, & all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image King Nebu. had set up. ³...They stood before the image that Nebu. had set up. ⁴& the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, & languages, ⁵that when you hear the sound of... every kind of music, you are to fall down & worship the golden image King Nebu. has set up. ⁶Whoever does not fall down & worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."⁷Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of... every kind of music, all peoples, nations, & languages fell down & worshiped the golden image King Nebu. had set up*

Nebuchadnezzar makes 90' statue.

Everyone is to bow before it.

King calls political leaders—to set example.

Plan: when instruments play, everyone drops everything & worships.

Anyone who refuses will be thrown in a fiery furnace.

REPORT OF DISOBEDIENCE 8-12 *"Certain Chaldeans came forward & maliciously accused the Jews. ⁹They declared to King Nebu. "O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of... every kind of music, shall fall down & worship the golden image. ¹¹& whoever does not fall down & worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. ¹²There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, &*

Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image you have set up."

When they abstained, politicians went to tell the king.

It's a plot to *get rid of* these Jewish political leaders. [early anti-semitism!]

Professing loyalty, they tell king these 3, whom *HE* appointed as leaders over province of Babylon, refuse to submit to his decree.

THREE ACCUSATIONS: 12

1) They don't pay attention to you i.e., don't respect you

2) They don't serve your gods

3) They don't worship your image

THEIR TRIAL 13-18

King's angry—he promoted them but they don't worship his statue.

He gives them another chance—they still refuse. **13-14**

"Nebu. in furious rage commanded that Shad-rach, Meshach, & Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king.

¹⁴Nebu. answered & said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"

King's question: 15

"What god can deliver you out of my hands?"

King's view of pagan gods: gods can't help!

His gods never did anything like this for *him*.

Gods don't intervene to save people!

Only happens in myths!

Their question: Do THEY believe God's going to save them? **16-18**

*"Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego answered & said to the king, "O Nebu. we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷If this be so, **our God whom we serve is able** to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, & 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."*

Like us, they don't doubt God's **ability** to save them.

What they don't know is HIS PLAN. **Will God save us?**

God never gave guarantee they wouldn't die in the oven.

They enter fire without reading Dan. 3!

They trust God without knowing the consequences of their faith.

"Even if He doesn't..." **Their decision:**

"We still won't serve your gods nor worship the image"

They can't obey—but they don't rebel.

They don't challenge authority God established.

They DO submit to higher authority

They entrust their lives to God

They make a public profession of faith in Yahweh,

They stand firm in commitment not to worship another god.

Even if God lets them die, they'll remain faithful.

They're committed to **recognizing Yahweh as Lord**

They don't have to go on living.

Survival isn't necessary. *Obeying God is!*

Ancient story: pagan pilot sailing in storm, in desperation cries:

'Father Neptune, sink me if you will, or save me if you will, but whatever happens, I will keep my rudder true!'"

Job: *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!"*

"Keep my rudder true!"

THEIR PUNISHMENT 19-23 *"Nebu. was filled with fury, & the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, & Abed-nego. He ordered furnace heated 7 times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰He ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego, & cast them into the*

burning fiery furnace. ²¹Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, & their other garments, & they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. ²²Because the king's order was urgent & the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego. ²³And these 3 men... fell bound into the burning fiery furnace."

He became so angry, he ordered fire 7 X hotter

–so hot men who threw them in were killed by its heat.

–They couldn't even get *near* it safely!

God gives them grace to face the furnace.

THEIR DELIVERANCE 24-27

King looks over dead bodies of his strong men & finds 3 who had been tied are loose & walking around unharmed!

Nebu. is out to get them. He's furious.

He intends to destroy them; **fire frees them!**

God's with them in the fire!

They're free from king's power

–He can't get near them!

We need to ask: what's worst thing that could happen to us?

If they kill us, we're free—from bondage,
free from pain, present with God

What can people do to us that will destroy us?

We fear when we lose perspective

–when we lose sight of God!

More surprising: presence of 4th

–"looks like **a son of the gods!**"

24-25

²⁴*King Nebu. was astonished & rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast 3 men bound into the fire?" They answered & said to the king, "True, O king."* ²⁵*He answered & said,*

*"But I see 4 men unbound, **walking** in midst of the fire, & they are not hurt; & the appearance of the 4th is like a son of the gods."*

Their God not only COULD save them, but DID save them.

Their God joins them in the fire.

He doesn't leave them to walk alone.

Recognition of their God—

"You servants of the most high (highest) God."

26 *"Nebu. came near the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Me-shach, & Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, & come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego came out from the fire."*

By his concept of a god, this could never have happened!

Pagan gods never intervene in real life to save their people.

Nebuchadnezzar orders them out! [sort of funny]

They could have refused,

or asked him to send someone for them!

King can't *obligate* them to do anything. ***They're free!***

Evidence considered 27 *"The satraps, pre-fects, governors, & the king's counselors gathered together & saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads wasn't singed, their cloaks weren't harmed, & no smell of fire had come upon them."*

Everyone gathers to take a look. *Unbelievable!!*

–Ropes binding them were burned off,
but clothes untouched

–Not a hair singed

–Not even smell of fire (nor smoke!)

–*pagan gods can't do such a thing!*

THEIR EXALTATION 28-30

God is glorified 28-29 *"Nebu. answered & said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego, who has sent his angel & delivered his servants, who trusted him, & set aside king's command, & yielded up their bodies rather than serve & worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, & their houses laid in ruins, for **there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way.**"*

2nd time, Nebu. recognizes *THIS* God is different!

He's never seen a God like this One!

He must be highest of all gods!

God who RESCUES His servants

God for Whom people risk lives

Demands respect for their God

"No other god is able to deliver this way!"

Faithful promoted 30 *"The king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego in the province of Babylon."*

They risk everything--God rewards them for faithfulness

There'd been no guarantees of reward

–no guarantees of survival!

Only guarantee: GOD IS FAITHFUL

FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS ULTIMATELY TRIUMPH!

WHAT LESSON DO WE LEARN?

God protects His people when we remain faithful

They could quote **COMMON EXCUSES** for not taking a stand for God:

1) **Everybody's doing it!**

Others of God's family around us.

None of them are resisting.

2) When in Babylon, do as Babylonians do!

It's only a statue—not really a god anyway; it's not that big a deal!

Temptation, away from home,

do what you'd *never* do at home!

Don't make waves! No one will know the difference

3) If we get killed, who will testify for God?

We're more useful here.

We can help our people by staying.

**4) "We'll just bend our bodies so it *looks like* we're worshipping,
but we'll bow down to the true God in our hearts."**

God knows *our hearts* only bow to Him.

Any excuse will do for people willing to compromise with pagans.

**These young men would not yield,
whether anyone else did or not!**

Plenty did, but 3 take stand—even if they have to stand alone.

They don't protest pagan practice of Babylon—that's pagans' problem!
THEY remain loyal to Yahweh & worship Him alone.

They can't compromise and join popular refrain "*any old god will do!*"

Yahweh alone is God—God who rescues His people!

God is glorified because they risk their lives to be faithful to Him

Those who made excuses and didn't stand firm have been forgotten.

Those who didn't hang on to glory, position, or life, **gained all 3!**

Have you noticed?

Those who walk through the fire understand true freedom?

When will we learn?

THE FLAME CAN'T HURT US!

Affliction is God's instrument to make us all God wants us to be!

[How Firm a Foundation]

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,

My grace all sufficient, shall be thy supply:

The flame shall NOT hurt thee;

I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose

I will not—I will not—desert to its foes;

That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,

I'll never—no, never—no, never—forsake!

We have an opportunity to take a stand for God here

Will WE take a risk?

- ... be a lighthouse in the darkness?

- ... speak up for Jesus so that others may hear the good news?

- ... risk the "fire" of social pressure and ridicule?