



Daniel – Thriving in Babylon

Part 2 - The Refusal to Compromise

Key Passage

Daniel 3:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

The story of the fiery furnace is one of the most iconic in the entire Bible. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego’s refusal to compromise resulted in their gruesome execution; at least, that’s what should have happened. In the midst of the fire, God appeared to protect his people from harm, and in so doing glorified Himself above the Babylonian king. Instead of fleeing from the fire, Christians should be prepared to walk through it as our Jewish forebears once did (and in their case, quite literally).

As the United States continue in their march against the Judeo-Christian principles upon which they were founded, the greater need there will be for men of great courage, conviction, and commitment to the Lord. Victory may not entail the maintaining of our rights and freedoms in this country (which should rightly be fought for with everything we have); rather, we must recognize it will likely look like remaining steadfast for the sake of Christ amidst persecution. To thrive in Babylon, we must be obedient no matter the cost.



BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
 - What is something the group can be praying about?
 - What is something the group can praise this week?
 - Are there any lingering thoughts from the prior week's discussion?
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- Name a time that you have refused to compromise something.
 - What are the areas you believe the church has refused to compromise?
 - What are the areas you believe the church may have compromised?

BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Daniel 3:1-3 (NIV)

3 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. ³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

At the onset of chapter three, King Nebuchadnezzar erects an ‘image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide.’ Sixty cubits in height equates to about ninety feet, or roughly the length of an average basketball court. It is unlikely that the image was made entirely from solid gold, but rather another material was simply overlaid with gold, creating the appearance of a solid gold image. Regardless, Nebuchadnezzar’s choosing of gold appears not to have been incidental.

In the prior chapter, the king received a prophetic dream whereby there was a strange statue composed of five distinct parts:

- The head – gold
- The chest and arms – silver
- The belly and thighs – bronze
- The legs – iron
- The feet – partly iron and partly clay

The vision ends with a stone being hurled at the feet of the statue, causing the statue to collapse and shatter into pieces, and the stone transforms into a great mountain that fills the whole earth. Daniel received wisdom from God and interpreted the golden head of the statue as representing Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom, Babylon. However, the other pieces of the statue, made of separate materials, represented kingdoms that would arise in the future after Babylon; in other words, the king was destined to lose his power and authority. It comes as no surprise then that, following such a dramatic vision, he chooses gold as the building material for his own image. That only the head of the statue was gold demonstrated his empire was temporary; erecting a statue *entirely* of gold was Nebuchadnezzar’s declaration before God that Babylon would reign eternally!



The king clearly did not accept God's will. Instead, he actively sought to undermine it by glorifying himself amongst the people of Babylon with a great and blasphemous image. As part of this special event, 'the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image.' The exact meaning of these seven positions is unclear, other than they are listed in descending order of rank, but the purpose of their gathering is not: Nebuchadnezzar is in control, and no one should dare question his authority.

Daniel 3:4-7 (NIV)

⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Some conjecture that the image was of Nebuchadnezzar himself, but this is unlikely given that the Babylonians did not believe their king was divine. It was more likely an image of a Babylonian god, perhaps the king's patron god Nabu or the chief Babylonian god Marduk. His demand was that the people forsake whatever gods they worship and bow before his. For the Babylonians, this was likely an easy task given they already placed their faith in these gods; for the Jews who were now captive in Babylon, it was a slightly different story.

The Jews followed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the gods of Babylon. At least, that's what they were supposed to do. The Jews had been banished from the promised land precisely for their unfaithfulness to the Lord. It is not entirely surprising then that 'as soon as they heard the sound of the horn... all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold.' Either fearing for their lives or having given over their allegiance to Babylon, the Jews submitted to Nebuchadnezzar's rule and authority. Except, that is, for three individuals: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. They refused to bow when they heard the sound, despite the warning that they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. How did these three Jewish men remain obedient no matter the cost?



1. They Refused to Conform

In America, there is quickly approaching a day where there will be a significant cost for publicly following Jesus. To keep one's faith hidden behind closed doors is not an option for the Christian. Surely there were faithful Jews that fateful day besides the three, but they did not have the courage to stand in opposition to the false gods of this world. And unlike the average Jew in Babylon, the three especially had a lot to lose by refusing to conform. In the prior chapter, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego had been promoted to a position within the Babylonian government of even higher stature thanks to Daniel's petition to the king following his successful interpretation of the dream. Yet they were nonetheless willing to lose prominence within higher society, even willing to lose their own lives in the bowels of a fiery furnace.

Daniel 3:8-12 (NIV)

⁸ At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

The three's defiance is reported to Nebuchadnezzar by 'some astrologers.' Other translations say 'Chaldeans,' which is both a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people, or far more likely in this case, a specific term for Babylonian priests who actually served as astrologers to the king. Their motive in denouncing the Jews is nothing more than a hatred of the Jewish people, which is unfortunately a common occurrence in the Bible. Because the Jews are God's chosen people, it is only natural for the darkness to seek their demise; to destroy God's representatives is a blind attempt to destroy God.

In the same way, the church now joins Israel as God's representatives here on earth to the nations of the world. Accordingly, the world seeks our demise because of our association with the light. People who have convictions, especially Godly convictions in the case of the Christian, will not be liked by the world and will be persuaded to compromise. If they won't go silently, then they will be removed. In America today, the current presidential administration, like Nebuchadnezzar, is openly hostile towards the church. The waving of the pride flag from the banister of the White House demonstrates a clear and undeniable lack of respect towards God and His Word, and in fact should be seen as an adamant rejection of the God of the Bible in how it glories in what the Lord Himself calls 'abominable' sin.



America is far from as dangerous to Christians as Babylon was for Jews, but social and political movements are becoming increasingly anti-church. We must decide today what we will do when they attempt to compromise us. If we wait, you may find out that it is already too late. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego made their decision long before that image was erected for all to see. For this reason, even death could not dissuade them.

2. Be Willing to Lose

When we choose not to conform, we must accept the possibility that we might lose. Christianity in America has become diluted by preachers who promise wealth, comfort, and security to followers of Christ in exchange for their obedience. If the story of Daniel has taught us anything, this couldn't be further from the truth; our very *lives* are required as a sacrifice, if necessary, to follow Jesus faithfully. And unfortunately, there are those in this world who are looking to take them.

Daniel 3:13-15 (NIV)

¹³Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

Nebuchadnezzar's declaration is a direct challenge to the power of God. He doesn't believe the three can be rescued from the great heat of the furnace, and many times neither do Christians. When faced with the fire, we turn away and provide our allegiance to idols rather than God. There is a fascination with the avoidance of pain that stems from entitlement. In a country such as ours where our government recognizes God-given and inalienable rights and allows the people the freedom to live their lives as they see fit, it is so easy to feel as though we deserve better when trouble comes our way.

Yet Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego didn't complain of persecution; they welcomed it. The Apostles carried this same resolve in the days of the early church when pressured by the Roman empire to conform to its godless culture. The truth is that in this life we will endure trial and tribulation, and sometimes it will appear as though we are losing. Remember that great stature from the king's vision? Remember those feet made of iron and clay? Those are a representation of a final world empire that is coming soon, ruled by none other than the Anti-Christ. When he appears, a trouble will befall the world that has never before been seen nor will ever be seen again.



The Bible teaches that Christians will be present for this final test. If you have ever read the book of Revelation, then you know that the climax of world history will be devastating. It will seem as though God has lost control and that Christians are being overcome. Yet the promise of God is that if we persevere in Christ's name, the lost will be saved. We may lose our lives, but others will gain their souls. The spirit of that devilish kingdom is already at work today here in America, and its ascendancy may mean the stripping of our rights and freedoms as Christians. It may look like a defeat, but really it is an opportunity to shine the light of Christ amongst our country like never before.

3. Look for Rescue

When a day of trouble comes, we must look to God as our refuge and strength. He is the one who will rescue us; if not our physical bodies, then our souls in Heaven.

Daniel 3:19-27 (NIV)

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^{al} from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." ¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." ²⁵ He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods." ²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.



God does not promise us deliverance from trial and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego understood this fact more than most. Their faith in God did not rest on the belief that He would necessarily protect them from all danger, but rather it rested on His unquestionable sovereignty over all situations. Even if they perished in the flames of the furnace, the three would never bow before Babylon; they would remain faithful towards God. This is undoubtedly one of the strongest examples of steadfast faith in the entire Bible.

The furnace itself was built on a small hill or mound and had openings in the top and on the sides. Fuel and vessels full of ore would be thrown into the fire from the top, and the smelters could track their progress through the openings in the side. When the work was complete, a door would be opened where the metal could be taken out once processed. If the fire was not hot enough, bellows were placed through openings in the furnace to stoke the fire. For the three's execution, Nebuchadnezzar ordered that the furnace be heated up to seven times the usual temperature.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego's deaths seemed all but certain. No man could survive such a blaze; in fact, the soldiers who dropped the three into the furnace died simply from the heat as they approached! Yet in the midst of the flames Nebuchadnezzar spots a fourth person in the furnace among them who he describes as looking 'like a son of the gods.' This may have been an angel sent by the Lord to rescue His people, but it is very possible this figure was a Christophany. A Christophany is any pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, such as when the Lord appeared in a pillar of smoke and fire to the Israelites being led out of Egypt, when He wrestled with Jacob in the wilderness, or when He appeared as a commander before Joshua to lead the armies of Israel into Canaan.

Jesus does not promise to deliver us *from* the fire, but *in* the fire. We work so hard trying to avoid the fire instead of looking for God's presence in the midst of it. This does not mean that we shouldn't fight to save our nation from the evil overtaking it; rather, it is a refusal to complain or be discouraged when we lose these earthly battles. We should find hope in trusting a God who is more than capable of handling our situation, but even if He doesn't, we should still trust Him. The ultimate victory is already won through the Cross and the resurrection. Regardless of what happens to America or the church, this fact cannot be overcome.

When the Anti-Christ comes, he too will set up an image for himself as Nebuchadnezzar did, and those who refuse to receive his mark will not be allowed to buy or sell. Yet the hope of Christians in this time is that Jesus is on His way, and the armies of Heaven are riding with Him. Jesus will rescue us today in our affliction, and He will rescue us in the time to come.



BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- What did Nebuchadnezzar's golden image represent?
 - What might be a similar blasphemous image in our culture today?
- Why did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refuse to compromise?
 - What specific decisions can we make today so that we don't compromise in the future?
- What might it look like for us to 'lose' in our culture despite our best efforts? How do many Christians view 'losing' the battle in America today?
 - What kind of results *should* we be looking for to be considered truly successful in our efforts?
- How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego face the fiery furnace without fear?
 - How can we face the challenges of our day with that same resolve?