



Unit .16

Session .01

God's Presence Sustains His People

Scripture



Daniel 3:13-18, 24-30

13 Then in a furious rage Nebuchadnezzar gave orders to bring in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king. **14** Nebuchadnezzar asked them, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, is it true that you don’t serve my gods or worship the gold statue I have set up? **15** Now if you’re ready, when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, fall down and worship the statue I made. But if you don’t worship it, you will immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire—and who is the god who can rescue you from my power?” **16** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the king, “Nebuchadnezzar, we don’t need to give you an answer to this question. **17** If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. **18** But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.” ... **24** Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm. He said to his advisers, “Didn’t we throw three men, bound, into the fire?” “Yes, of course, Your Majesty,” they replied to the king. **25** He exclaimed, “Look! I see four men,

not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.” **26** Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and called: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God—come out!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. **27** When the satraps, prefects, governors, and the king’s advisers gathered around, they saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men: not a hair of their heads was singed, their robes were unaffected, and there was no smell of fire on them. **28** Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him. They violated the king’s command and risked their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. **29** Therefore I issue a decree that anyone of any people, nation, or language who says anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be torn limb from limb and his house made a garbage dump. For there is no other god who is able to deliver like this.” **30** Then the king rewarded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Intro Options



Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Main Point:
Even during the most difficult times, God is with His people.

Option 1

Allegiance. This word isn't one we hear often today. The United States has a Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, which contains the line, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America..." In fact, there is even a "Flag Code" that dictates how the pledge should be said. This code calls for the highest level of respect: people stand facing the flag, with the right hand placed over the heart. Military personnel must silently face and salute the flag as the pledge is said. Some might wonder, "All of this for a flag?" But to the United States, the flag represents a united nation and respect for what it took to get to that point and preserve it. The pledge is meant to be a symbol of devotion and commitment, a statement that aligns the people with their country, and a promise to stand with it no matter what.

In a greater way, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had pledged their allegiance to God. Despite being taken into captivity in a foreign land and being ordered to worship something other than God, they stood firm with God. They knew that no matter what the consequences, their hearts belonged to God and they would not bow to or express their allegiance to any other authority.

- **What do you think it means to express allegiance to God?**
- **Describe how you might react if you had to choose between following God or an earthly leader.**

Option 2

Nate Saint, along with four other missionaries, were killed as they attempted to share the gospel with the unreached Huaorani people group. Before going these men knew the risks. They knew they could die a martyr's death. However, the gospel was too important. Nate Saint wrote: "The way I see it, we ought to be willing to die. In the military, we were taught that to obtain our objectives we had to be willing to be expendable. Missionaries must face that same expendability."¹ This sense of expendability should not only belong to missionaries, but also to every follower of Jesus.

This way of looking at life and death—of realizing both are in God's hands—must have been familiar to the three Hebrew men we encounter in this session. Taken captive to Babylon in 605 B. C., their names were changed to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In today's session, we don't simply see these men display "courage under fire," but "courage in the fire!"

- **How might your life look different if you looked at life and death as being in God's hands and under His authority?**

TEACHING PLAN

At the end of the last volume we witnessed the fall of Jerusalem by an outside invader—Babylon. Because of their hardness of heart and continual idolatry, God disciplined His people by giving them over to their enemies. At this point in the story, one might think all was lost. The city had been captured, the temple ransacked, and the people destroyed. However, as the old hymn by William Cowper said, “Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.” Despite the doom and gloom of these events, God was still at work. He had not abandoned His people. In fact, He is ever-present with those whose hearts remain loyal to Him.

Read Daniel 3:13-18.



Life in Babylon was difficult for God’s chosen people. In addition to being in a strange land, they watched Nebuchadnezzar’s narcissistic paganism lead to the construction of a statue that was likely symbolic of his unrivaled authority. Whether the image was of Nebuchadnezzar himself or one of his gods remains unclear, but the entire incident seemed to be a plot to test the loyalty of the king’s subjects. Thus, he commanded every nation gathered in Babylon to bow down and worship the image or else be cast into a burning furnace (3:4-6). Obviously, no dedicated follower of Yahweh could obey this idolatrous edict regardless of the cost.

▪ In what ways does our culture tempt us to compromise our faith?

Nebuchadnezzar was furious. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego resisted the herd mentality to bow down and bravely stood alone. The king commanded that they be brought before him (v. 13). He asked if the accusations were true that they would not serve his gods or “worship” the golden statue he set up (v. 14).

Before allowing them to answer, the king gave them a second chance (v. 15). Maybe he suspected they were accused by jealous rivals. Perhaps he genuinely liked them and was looking to provide them a way out of this political mess. If they would simply repent of disobeying the king, bow down, and worship his idol, all would be well and good. But if they did not, they would be immediately burned alive in the fiery furnace.

These young men weren’t sure how their situation would unfold. Would God spare them? Or would God allow the evil directed against them to continue? Yet, despite not knowing how God would respond, the young men stood firmly in their belief that God is in control, no matter the end result. And this is what faith does. It is easy to verbally affirm God’s power and sovereignty, but living out that belief is quite different. Knowing God has a perfect plan will not necessarily lessen the pain or frustration we feel when hardships interrupt the rhythm of our lives. The question at hand is not whether these incidents will arise, but how we will respond when they do. Ultimately, our view of God sets the tone for our hope in every crisis, our strength in every temptation, and our courage against all hostilities.

- **What are some ways Christians can demonstrate to their surrounding culture that their ultimate allegiance is to God?**
- **What can we learn from the Jewish men’s confession of faith when they claimed they would follow God even if He chose not to deliver them?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Even during the most
difficult times, God is
with His people.

Daniel 3

1. King Nebuchadnezzar once paid homage and praise to Daniel's God (2:46-47), but his devotion was shallow and short-lived. In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar set up a great statue that was 90 feet tall with a width of 9 feet, gold plated from head to toe (3:1). The biblical writer went to great lengths to note the idolatrous nature of this statue of gold. The word "image" occurred more than 10 times in chapter 3, and as you know, God's people were forbidden to worship graven "images" of any sort (Ex. 20:4).

8. Notice the enemies' tactics here. They asked the king if he saw what these young men did—or rather didn't do. First, "These men have ignored you" (They don't respect you.) Secondly, "they do not serve your gods." (On this one, the enemies were correct!) Third, "They do not... worship the gold statue you have set up." (Right again!) In essence, the enemies accused the Jewish men of failing to give ultimate allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar.

So it would appear that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in a no-win situation. The critics came out in the open, they carefully called out the king, and he had to do something to save face. The future did not look bright for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

16-18. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image communicated their profound faith in God's sovereignty and goodness in their lives. Though these men knew God could deliver them, their course of action was not dependent upon what their Master chose to do. By measuring their immediate circumstance against the backdrop of their eternal victory, they were able to withstand an unnerving threat without flinching. Foundational to this profound display of faith was the conviction that God is always working for the good of His children, even if it is not clear how.



99 Essential Doctrines (p. 8, DDG)

Faith

Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16-21). More than simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4:13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1:10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Daniel 3:24-27.



Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's refusal to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image provoked his fiercest wrath. After ordering the increased heat of his tortuous furnace, the reckless dictator had the three Hebrew men tied up and tossed into the fire (3:19-21). The flames were so hot that their Babylonian oppressors died carrying out the king's command (3:22). The death of these faithful servants seemed all but certain as they fell into the frightening inferno. Yet, as He often does, the Lord intervened in a supernatural way. Not only was God present in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, but He also powerfully brought the men out of their trial. When the Lord carries us through our difficulties, whether by miraculous or ordinary means, His presence is undeniable. Though relief from suffering may not be our greatest earthly need, it is wonderful to experience divine deliverance from our deepest hurts nonetheless. Surviving daily trials unscathed also reminds us that we will one day withstand the coming storm of God's judgment. Because of Christ's sacrificial work on the cross, the fires of God's wrath will never consume us. 

- **How does this encourage you as you face difficulties in your life?**

Read Daniel 3:28-30.



Nebuchadnezzar invited the three Jewish men out of the furnace for all to see that the fire had brought no bodily harm to them (3:27). In fact, there was no evidence that these men were in the furnace: no singed hair, no burnt clothes, and not even the scent of fire. The king rightly attributed this to their God (v. 28), the God he called "the Most High God" (3:26), and earlier called "God of gods, Lord of kings" (2:47).

The resulting decree (v. 29) gave testimony to the strength of Israel's God even though Babylon's king remained thoroughly pagan. The entire incident demonstrated the profound witness the faith of God's people can have on those around them. Our lives should always communicate that Christ is strong, good, and holy. Every trial we face is a battleground for proving that our Savior is not only glorious because of what He has done, but also, and even more importantly, because of who He is.

- **When has your faith revealed God's glory to others?**
- **What are some other examples in Scripture where we see God being a Savior who draws near to His people during their time of need? (See Ex. 3:6,12; Isa. 43:2; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 8:37-39; Heb. 13:5; 1 Pet. 4:12-14.)**

Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of this account is when Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery furnace and saw four men instead of three. He said the fourth "looks like a son of the gods" (v. 25). Later he called him an "angel" (v. 28). That was not a bad guess for a pagan polytheist. However, we know better. The One who walked with them in and through the fire is also the One who walked through death on our behalf so that we too would not be singed by the flames we actually deserve. 

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Even during the most
difficult times, God is
with His people.

Daniel 3

25. The presence of a fourth man in the fire is a vivid reminder that God is present to comfort us on our most difficult days (Isa. 43:1-3; 2 Cor. 1:3-5). Before the Lord delivered these men, He chose to be in the fire with them. Though God does not always remove our troubles, He remains active in them nonetheless. He refuses to forsake us when the path of difficulty is His chosen course for our lives. Had these three Jewish heroes remained in the fire that day, God would have stayed with them until the end.

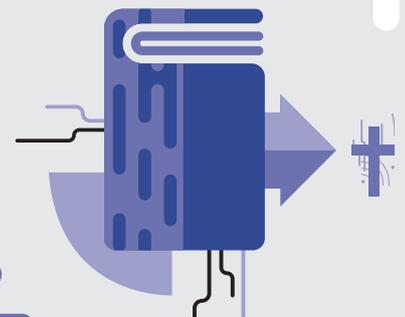
Likewise, our Savior will minister to us while the world around us is falling apart. Not only does He bear our burdens for us (Matt. 11:28), but He also promises that no tribulation or trial can separate us from the love He gives (Rom. 8:35). He gives us peace that surpasses understanding when we call out to Him in prayer (Phil. 4:6-7). When the pain is so deep we cannot express it with words, His Spirit intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27). We are never defenseless to the changing circumstances of a fallen world because of God's enduring presence.

28. "It is clear that Nebuchadnezzar experienced once again (like chapter 2) conviction when he met the Most High God. However, conviction is not conversion! Like the beast, the antichrist of Revelation 13, he still will have an image citizens must worship or they will die. Like that beast, he thinks he will have a kingdom that never ends. Like that beast, he too is badly, badly mistaken."²

30. "Babylon had defeated Judah in battle, and pagans commonly held that victory over another nation was proof that their god was greater than the deity of the conquered foe. Yahweh wanted to dispel any such notion. Through this miracle and others recorded in the book, Yahweh made it clear to Nebuchadnezzar (who blatantly challenged Yahweh's power by his actions in this incident) and to all the world that Judah's defeat was not because their God did not exist or was anemic."³

(p. 10, DDG) Christ Connection

The same God who was all-powerful, faithful, and present with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the flames will also deliver us through His Son—who is with us in the fiery trials of life and who saves us from the punishment for our sin.



Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

Head



What does this account teach us about how to respond to suffering?

What does this account teach us about God's character when we suffer?

Heart



In what areas of your life have you displayed pride like Nebuchadnezzar?

How does the faith of these young Jewish men encourage you when it comes to dealing with pride in your own heart?

Hands



How does this account help us remain strong in faith as we seek to follow Jesus today?

What are some ways we can encourage and support brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who face intense opposition to their faith?

Main Point: **Even during the most difficult times, God is with His people.**



Head

Throughout Scripture certain events foreshadow the coming work of Christ even as they demonstrate how God interacts with His people. The salvation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego vividly illustrates God's presence with us as we endure life's trials. The Lord is not distant from or calloused by our pain. He comforts, sustains, and guides us through the worst possible scenarios. Living courageously in the midst of fear is the tangible expression of our steady faith in God's sovereignty over all that happens to us. As the world becomes increasingly wicked, we must be willing to face the consequences for holy living without hesitation. As long as the Lord is with us, whom should we fear (Ps. 27:1)?



Heart

It's hard for us to identify with Nebuchadnezzar in this account, but maybe we should. Do we not sometimes exalt ourselves in similar ways? Do we not often act as if matters of destiny are in our hands and not God's? Do we not draw attention to who we are, who we know, and what we have done? Is the same pride that is in the heart of this king not lurking in our own? When we are honest with ourselves, we will come to the conclusion that we also have pride within our own hearts and that this pride causes us to trust in ourselves rather than in the God of our salvation.



Hands

Honoring and obeying God is not always popular. Sometimes, allegiance to God leads to serious problems and, in many cases, life-threatening situations. While the latter may not often be your experience, it is a daily reality for many of our brothers and sisters around the world. Just from living a life that is faithful to the God and Savior they love, these believers are criticized, ostracized, and hated. Still, they declare by words and actions that we obey God above men (Acts 5:29).