

Cottonwood Creek Church

DANIEL

SESSION FOUR: FAITHFUL WHEN PRESSED

DANIEL 3:1-30

9.29.24

MAIN POINT

We must stand firm in our faith, even when we feel the pressure to fall to the standards of the culture around us.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Who comes to mind when you think about demonstrating courageous faith? Someone in history? Someone in your own life?

What about this person demonstrated faith through difficulty?

Giving up is easy. We all know it's easier to quit than it is to fight. This applies to our marriages, health, jobs, faith walks, and more. What do you think causes us to give up? Peer pressure can force us to do things we normally would not do. Daniel's companions faced the pressure to give up and worship false gods. Yet, we see in them an example of faithfulness in the face of pressure even if it meant death. They understood that even if God didn't deliver them, He was still worthy of their trust and worship.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ DANIEL 3:1-7.

What was Nebuchadnezzar's purpose in setting up the statue? Why would he require people to worship it at all costs? Why do you think the people obeyed?

What statues has our society created that you feel we worship?

When have you felt pressure to conform to cultural standards that went against God's will?

As a bold statement of his own power and authority, Nebuchadnezzar had a giant golden statue about 90 feet tall built in Babylon. It was an image declaring the power and superiority of Babylon, and he demanded that all the leaders come and worship it. Nebuchadnezzar knew that if he could get the leaders of Babylon to worship the idol, then the people would follow suit.

READ DANIEL 3:8-18.

How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego respond to the king's threat?

How were they able to stand against the king as they did? Do you think standing against the king as a group rather than as individuals was easier?

How should the response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego challenge us to stand in the face of peer pressure? How did their faith inform their action?

Why is it important that we put emphasis on the object of the three men's faith and not their personal strength to exhibit faith?

What is the significance of their statement, "Even if He does not..."? How can this encourage us in our own trials?

Some of the others who were in the king's employ informed him about Daniel's friends. The English translation states they maliciously accused the Jews of not obeying the king's orders. Perhaps they were jealous of the status the Jews had been given in the king's court. Regardless of their reasoning, they wanted to see them punished. However, the three men were given a second chance. Brought before the king, they were given an opportunity to change their minds and follow the king's command, but they would not be shaken or threatened into disobedience before their God.

READ DANIEL 3:19-30.

Why do you think the king responded even more harshly than he initially threatened?

How did God provide in a seemingly impossible circumstance?

How did the king respond to seeing the men emerge from the fire untouched?

How does God's presence with them in the furnace demonstrate His faithfulness in our own trials?

The king had undoubtedly been threatened by the men's refusal to worship. His authority was questioned, and his response was clearly an overreaction. Even though everyone else had followed his orders, he would make an example of the three who refused. Once the men were thrown in the furnace, the king looked in, fully expecting to see them quickly burned up in the flames. Yet, he not only saw them alive and unbound, but also saw a fourth person in there with them, one that looked like a son of the gods.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Where do you struggle to be faithful in the face of peer pressure?
How might the Lord be challenging you to be bold in your faith in
this area, even though it may lead to personal loss or discomfort?**

**In what ways does this chapter challenge us to examine our own
idols and areas of compromise in our lives?**

**How can we support one another in our church community when
facing persecution for our beliefs?**

**How might you share the gospel or invite someone to church this
week using this account from Daniel?**

PRAYER

Take some time in prayer to ask God for the courage and faith to trust Him completely, even when you face strong opposition and peer pressure.

COMMENTARY

DANIEL 3:1-30

3:1. The events of Dn 3 probably took place shortly after Daniel explained the king's dream (cp. Dn 2), although some estimate that it could have been ten or even twenty years later. Babylonian records indicate that there was a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar during the tenth year of his reign, so this may have led to the king's desire for the loyalty test described here. The gold statue was not likely solid gold but was instead overlaid with it. Nebuchadnezzar probably decked the entire thing in gold to negate the message conveyed by the statue of his dream, wherein only the head was gold and signaled that the Babylonian Empire would only be temporary. The location of the plain of Dura has not been conclusively identified. Daniel was not involved in the events here since he remained in the capital city at the king's court (2:49) while other officials including his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were called to Dura to show their loyalty. Had Daniel been there he too would have refused to bow to the image.

3:2-3. The exact meaning of these seven positions is unclear other than that they are listed in descending order of rank.

3:4-5. Three of the instruments mentioned either . . . harp, and drum are the only Greek loan words in Daniel. The presence of Greek words does not require that Daniel was written later in the Greek period. Even Assyrian inscriptions that predate the Babylonian period refer to Greek instruments and musicians (Archer, Daniel). Although some conjecture that the gold statue was of Nebuchadnezzar himself, this is unlikely because the Babylonians did not believe their king was divine. More likely, the image was of a Babylonian god, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's patron Nabu or the chief Babylonian god Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar made this demand as some form of loyalty oath to him personally.

3:6. Incineration in a furnace of blazing fire as punishment that Nebuchadnezzar had also used on two Judean false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab (Jr 29:22) was a normal

Babylonian penalty as seen in the Code of Hammurabi, Sections 25, 110, and 157. Perhaps this furnace was built to smelt the gold for the image Nebuchadnezzar had made.

3:7. All the people obviously did not include Daniel (who may have been exempt) and his three friends.

3:8. Chaldeans is both a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people and, as used here, a specific term for priests who served as astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men in the king's government. Their motive in denouncing the three faithful Jewish men was not devotion to the king's demand but rather a hatred for the Jewish people. Hatred of the Jewish people is often on display in the Bible, as with Haman (Est 3:5-6). It reflects a hatred of the God of Israel and is expressed through oppression and attempted genocide of his people (Ps 83:2-5).

3:9-16. The high point of these verses is the king's question, Who is the god who can rescue you from my power? God himself would provide the answer.

3:17-18. The king offered Daniel's friends a second chance to worship the idol, but they persistently refused. The Aramaic imperfect verb *yeseziv* (he can rescue) in this context indicates possibility and not certainty. They were saying that God might deliver them or he might choose not to do so. Their faith in God did not rest on the belief that he would perform a miracle, but that their sovereign God could be trusted. They asserted that if God chose not to deliver them from this punishment but instead allowed them to become martyrs for him, they would still refuse to serve the king's gods or worship the gold statue. This is one of the strongest examples of steadfast faith in the Bible.

3:19. The enraged king (see also 2:12; 3:13) gave orders to heat the furnace seven times more than was customary, an idiom for as hot as possible.

3:20-22. If the fire would burn up those who carried the three men, how much more likely would it burn up the men themselves?

3:23. The furnace was built on a small hill or mound with openings at the top and side. So the three men fell . . . into the furnace from the top, and the king was able to see four men in the furnace (v. 25) as he looked in through the side opening.

3:24-25. The king saw in the furnace a fourth figure who looked like a son of the gods. This may have been an angel or even a preincarnate appearance of God the Son.

3:26-27. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar and all his government officials saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men. Not only did the fire fail to burn their hair and clothing, but they did not even have the smell of fire on them. Hebrews 11:34 cites this miracle of faith, referring to those who quenched the raging of fire.

3:28-30. After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were spared, Nebuchadnezzar saw that the God of Israel was greater than all other gods. Even so, he remained a worshiper of many gods, falling short of full devotion of the one and only true God.²