

COURAGE

CORE PASSAGE: DANIEL 3:14-18, 24-29

CONTEXT

After three years of Babylonian training, Daniel and his friends served the king as advisers. One night, the king had a disturbing dream, and only Daniel, blessed with God's gift to interpret dreams, was able to answer the king about its meaning. That dream included a multi-layered statue and foretold the rise and fall of nations, beginning with Babylon, whose king was represented by the statue's golden head. Nebuchadnezzar later decided to build an enormous statue made entirely of gold and to have all of his subjects bow in worship to it. Daniel's friends, however, chose to remain faithful and to worship the Lord alone.

KEY CONCEPT

God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.

As you examine Daniel 3:14-18, 24-29:

- Recognize that the three friends' courage stemmed from their belief that God could be trusted in life or death.
- Notice how Nebuchadnezzar recognized God's power and gave Him the praise He deserved because of the three friends' faithful testimony.



TIMELINE

Daniel and His Friends
Remain Faithful to God's
Dietary Laws (Daniel 1)

SESSION STUDY:
**Daniel's Friends Refuse to Worship
Nebuchadnezzar's Statue (Daniel 3)**

Daniel Interprets the Writing on
the Wall for Belshazzar (Daniel 5)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's
First Dream (Daniel 2)

Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar's
Second Dream (Daniel 4)

Daniel Is Thrown into the
Lions' Den (Daniel 6)

Daily Readings

- ☐ **Day 1:** Daniel 3
- ☐ **Day 2:** Daniel 4
- ☐ **Day 3:** Obadiah

- ☐ **Day 4:** Ezekiel 40–44
- ☐ **Day 5:** Ezekiel 45–48
- ☐ **Day 6:** Psalm 14



Scan this QR code to access
this session's Scripture passages.

GOD IS ALWAYS ABLE TO SAVE (DANIEL 3:14-18).

Circle all the conjunctions, the connecting words, in the passage (and, but, if, then, when, etc.).

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.”

King Nebuchadnezzar set up a gold statue to be the center of worship for his subjects. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (previously called Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah) determined not to bow to it—they worshiped the Lord alone, even while facing a gruesome death. Some Chaldeans, likely jealous these Jews were set over Babylon’s affairs, told the king these three men would not serve his gods nor worship his statue, which enraged the king (vv. 1-13).

Daniel’s friends determined to obey God’s commandments: “Do not have other gods besides me. Do not make an idol for yourself” (Ex. 20:3-4). So Nebuchadnezzar, himself jealous for the worship and total submission of his subjects, did what all people do who set themselves against the one true God—he persecuted God’s faithful people, threatening them with death by fire.

LEADER NOTE: These three men faced a very real threat. Standing before the king, perhaps they saw the furnace in the distance. Their earthly lives seemed to be in Nebuchadnezzar’s hands. At the same time, these three men saw the ultimate weakness and smallness of Nebuchadnezzar compared to the Lord. They believed in the almighty, sovereign power of their very real God. Like Jesus’s apostles after them, they could have said, “We must obey God rather than people” (Acts 5:29). Perhaps Peter had Daniel’s three friends in mind when he said those words before those who crucified Jesus.

What are some ways believers today experience difficulties and persecution for their faith?

Key Concept: God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even if the result is death.

The persecution coming for these three courageous Jews was a very real threat, yet they saw this as an opportunity for them to give glory to God. Nebuchadnezzar mocked their God, claiming to have supreme power in this matter (Dan. 3:15). Still, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained firm in their faith. They would worship God alone, no matter the outcome. The Lord could rescue them with a miracle, but He might not. Both were acceptable outcomes because the Lord alone is the true God who is worthy of worship.

Notes

THEOLOGY CONNECTION

MIRACLES: A miracle is an event in which God makes an exception to the natural order or supersedes natural laws for the purpose of demonstrating His glory and/or validating His message. Miracles are recorded throughout Scripture; signs and wonders were oftentimes evident when a prophet or an apostle was speaking God's message to the people. Because we believe God to be all-powerful and personally involved in this world, we believe He can and does perform miracles.

These friends embodied Paul's words from Philippians 1:21: "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." For the Christian, there is no losing situation. As Jesus said, "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). The reverent fear of God is the end of all other earthly fears.

LEADER NOTE: Jesus told His disciples they would be persecuted for His name (Matt. 10:16-18). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were forerunners for those courageous disciples, and for us. They knew they faced the king's fury not because of a failure of faith but precisely because of their faith, and they trusted God with the outcome.

How can we become people who exhibit faith and courage even in the face of death?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

"Let faith be yours, and God will be with you in your trouble."¹
—Augustine of Hippo (c. 354–430)

GOD SAVES SO THAT ALL WOULD KNOW HE IS THE MOST HIGH GOD (DANIEL 3:24-29).

Circle every instance of God or gods in the passage.

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.”

The courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego sent Nebuchadnezzar into a rage. The furnace was heated seven times hotter than normal—so hot that his best soldiers who threw them in died from the heat (vv. 19-23). But the three did not die because the living God was among them.

Nebuchadnezzar himself was the one to notice the fourth man, an “angel” of God (v. 28), walking in the fire with the other three. The king who believed he had power over life and death was beholding a supreme power unlike any he could achieve. The flames of man cannot extinguish the glory of God!

LEADER NOTE: Long before the Babylonian exile, the prophet Isaiah prophesied: “When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, and the flame will not burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior” (Isa. 43:2-3). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in exile due to God’s judgment on their nation, but the Lord had not forsaken them. Perhaps this promise from Isaiah came to their minds as they roamed inside the furnace. They trusted in God’s power, and He was with them (v. 5).

Why do you think God gave Nebuchadnezzar the ability to see “the fourth man” in the fire?

God’s rescue of His servants was not for their sake only. Their preservation brought glory to God. Imagine it! The king who had ridiculed the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego now praised the very same God. What a turnaround!

The three friends risked their lives to serve God, and God came through. That’s a truth that rings through the ages. Whatever threat God’s people face, it is nothing compared to God’s power. He has all authority in heaven and on earth, and He laughs at the schemes of the wicked (Ps. 2:1-4). Nothing can move God from His throne, and nothing can thwart His plan of salvation for His people.

How have you seen the power of God at work in your life?

Not every fiery trial will end like this, however. Not everyone who stands up for God and His gospel survives the punishment of worldly kings. That doesn’t make God a failure. He is always powerful and glorious. No, flames can only kill the body. God can raise up the body again. Jesus was raised from death to life, and He will raise up everyone who trusts in Him on the last day (John 6:39-40).

LEADER NOTE: In the New Testament, Peter encouraged his brothers and sisters in Christ who endured persecution from Rome, saying: “Dear friends, don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:12-13). Even Jesus Himself, the Son of God, was not saved from an unjust death but went through the indignity of the cross and faced God’s wrath to save us from sin and the punishment we deserve. Because of Jesus, we believers may face man’s wrath but never God’s, and we will receive His promised gift of eternal life.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

God’s power saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire, and that same power resurrected Jesus Christ. Even in dire circumstances, God makes a way to accomplish His will, as seen ultimately in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

ARRIVAL

ENGAGE: Before the session, write “Would You Rather?” on a board or large sheet of paper. As the group arrives, invite people to write two silly but frightening choices, such as “Give a speech on national television or sing the national anthem at the Super Bowl? Go skydiving or deep-sea diving?” When ready, call out the choices and invite the group to raise their hands to show which choice they would prefer. You might also give some people a chance to explain their choices.

CONTEXT

SAY: Some time after Daniel and his friends entered King Nebuchadnezzar’s service, the king had a frightening dream that none of his wise men could interpret (Dan. 2). Daniel and his friends, however, prayed for God to reveal the dream and its meaning, and God did. When Daniel revealed and interpreted the king’s dream, Nebuchadnezzar said, “Your God is indeed God of gods, Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, since you were able to reveal this mystery” (v. 47). But in today’s Bible story, Nebuchadnezzar seems to have forgotten his declaration, as he built a golden statue and demanded everyone bow down to worship it. Daniel’s three friends, however, chose not to bow.

RECAP

ASK: Based on your personal preparation this week, how would you frame a “Would You Rather?” question for King Nebuchadnezzar? For Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

TRANSITION: At times in our lives, we have to decide between two or more choices that test our priorities. Daniel and his friends previously had chosen to obey the Lord over the king regarding food, risking a demotion, or worse. This time, the king personally made Daniel’s friends choose between worshiping a golden statue or immediately being thrown into a fiery furnace. As faithful worshipers of the living God, this really wasn’t a choice. The Lord alone deserved their worship and glory. Can the same be said about us? Let’s talk about it.



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Notes

NO MATTER THE COST		
THE THREAT	DEATH-DEFYING FAITH	THE REWARD
SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO	Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the golden statue and were thrown into the furnace. They were miraculously preserved and the furnace was destroyed.	They were rescued from the furnace and promoted to higher positions in the Babylonian court.
SHADRACH	Shadrach refused to bow down to the golden statue and was thrown into the furnace.	Shadrach was rescued from the furnace and promoted to a higher position.
MESHACH	Meshach refused to bow down to the golden statue and was thrown into the furnace.	Meshach was rescued from the furnace and promoted to a higher position.
ABEDNEGO	Abednego refused to bow down to the golden statue and was thrown into the furnace.	Abednego was rescued from the furnace and promoted to a higher position.

INSTRUCT: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 5: No Matter the Cost** and briefly review the threats faced by God's people. Direct the groups to discuss what consequences believers today might experience for courageously proclaiming and living out the gospel. After a few minutes, call for volunteers from each group to identify potential consequences, such as losing a job, losing friendships, and in some places of the world, even imprisonment or death. Record their answers in the right column of the chart and guide adults to write them in their PSG. Say: "Persecution of various forms is nothing new for those who worship the living God. But these potential consequences are not the end of the story for believers."

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Daniel 3:24-29.

SUMMARIZE: As in the case of Daniel's friends, the Lord preserved their lives in the fire, though we should note He did not prevent them from going into the fire. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego affirmed that the Lord is God and that He has the power to rescue His people if that is His will, but even if He doesn't, He alone is still worthy of our worship (vv. 16-18). To grasp the implications of this affirmation, we must fix our eyes on Jesus, the perfect Son of God who suffered the cross and death according to the Father's will for our salvation (Heb. 12:1-3). So, when the world plays the "music" and expects us to bow, look to Jesus, who was raised from the dead to give us the courage to stand firm.

DEBRIEF

How can we fix our eyes on Jesus instead of golden statues the world offers?

How can we encourage other believers who are facing fiery furnaces?

SUMMARIZE

The power God used to rescue Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Neither fire nor death can stop God from fulfilling His will. The Lord is all-powerful, and He's always in control. So no matter the "Would You Rather?" scenario we may face, may we always choose the courageous path of trust, obedience, and worship for the Lord.

HEAD, HEART, HANDS

Walk the group through the Head, Heart, Hands section in the PSG (p. 31). If running short on time, specifically highlight the **Heart** section in this week's study, inviting volunteers to share their responses to the question in this section.



HEAD: Miracles in the Bible can be disorienting. But taking God at His word means taking all of His Word to heart—even the miracles. After all, to believe in God at all is to believe in a miracle. Your faith is a miracle. Your life in Christ is a miracle. You may not have seen three men rescued from a fire, but have you seen a Christian, even in the mirror? Then you've seen a miracle.

Why is it important that we believe the miracles in the Bible?



HEART: Courage is a heart posture, a reliance upon God no matter the cost. Jesus doesn't coddle us but tells us the truth—we will have suffering in this world, but He also said He has overcome the world (John 16:33). No wonder the most repeated command in the Bible is “Do not fear” because “If God is for us, who is against us?” (Rom. 8:31).

What in your life keeps you from trusting God and obeying with courage?



HANDS: Courage is faith displayed. We inevitably will run into obstacles, temptations, and hard decisions while following Jesus. Yet these are opportunities to show courage in Christ, knowing that He has saved us by grace through faith and has given us His gift of eternal life.

How will you act with faith and courage this week, trusting the Lord for direction, words, and boldness?

NEXT STEPS

Challenge the group to consider these actions as responses to this session.

- Read Matthew 10:16-20. Reflect on Jesus's promise that the Holy Spirit will give us the words and courage to stand firm.
- Consider how the various areas of your life need to be adjusted to ensure you are not conforming to the ways of this world but conforming to Christ.
- Share with someone in your group how you will stand firm for the gospel this week, and invite a followup conversation later in the week.

Invite volunteers to share prayer needs for this week. Encourage them to record these in the space on page 31 in their PSG so they can pray for others throughout the week.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISES

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

CLOSE: Pray through Psalm 14:4-6 with your group, thanking God that while the wicked world is spinning out of control, He is a refuge to those who trust in Him.

References

1. Augustine of Hippo, quoted in Kenneth Stevenson and Michael Gluerup, eds., *Ezekiel, Daniel, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 183.