

Explore the Bible: January 30

Demonstrate Allegiance • Daniel 3:14-26

By Wayne VanHorn



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As long as Christians live in this sin-broken world, they will be confronted by various faith challenges. Today, we explore the truth that, “Believers must stand for God regardless of the potential costs.”

The key actors on the stage are Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, though they are called here by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, respectively.

The story of the fiery furnace is so well-known that it hardly needs retelling. It could easily be entitled, “Worshiping Gold, Ninety-Foot High and Nine-Foot Wide.” When the three Hebrew men were confronted with a command to worship the golden idol, they had to demonstrate their highest allegiance either to Nebuchadnezzar or the God they followed.

Nebuchadnezzar issued a decree for all government officials of the Babylonian Empire to assemble before the golden statue to dedicate it. Dedication took the form of bowing to the ground and worshiping the inanimate object.

“People of every nation and language” (Dan. 3:4,7) showed up and bowed down to the king’s idol. Three Hebrew men were the exception. Their political rivals reported their disobedience to Nebuchadnezzar.

Allegiance declared (Dan. 3:14-18). Nebuchadnezzar inquired of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego whether it was true they had not worshiped his gods or bowed down to the gold image he set up (Dan. 3:14). The king thought his direct persuasion would result in their full compliance. He gave them another chance to submit, adding a threat of immediate death by fire (3:15).

The three Hebrew faithfuls declined to give a neck-saving excuse (3:16). They did witness to the king regarding his question, "Who is the god who can rescue you from my power?" (3:15b). They proclaimed, "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" (3:17).

Hebrews 11:6 reminds us, "Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (CSB17).

Because they believed in God's existence, they also believed in His power to deliver them. They were soon to be rewarded for seeking the only true God, even in the shadow of the ninety-foot golden idol. They were so faithful that they declared their allegiance to God even if He did not rescue them. They would rather die as martyrs for the true God than bow the knee to a false god (Dan. 3:18).

Persecution intensified (Dan. 3:19-23). Nebuchadnezzar did not appreciate the three Hebrews regarding their unswerving faith in Yahweh. He became "filled with rage" (3:19a).

Moreover, the expression on his face changed toward them, meaning they went from trusted advisors to defiant subjects. The king's rage was manifested in his "orders to heat the furnace seven times more than customary" (3:19b).

Nebuchadnezzar had his "best soldiers" bind the three men and throw them into the furnace (3:20). The orders were carried out, but the king's best soldiers were killed by the raging

flames as their three captives were cast into the furnace (3:21-23).

Their persecution was intensified because of the intensity of their faith (3:23). Daniel, apparently away at the time, would face his own “fiery furnace” in the form of a den of hungry lions (6:1-28)

God honored (Dan. 3:24-26). Nebuchadnezzar’s momentary sense of triumph was shattered. He “jumped up in alarm,” confirming with his advisors that they indeed had cast “three men, bound, into the fire” (3:24). Nebuchadnezzar was alarmed because he saw “four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed” (3:25).

Thus, the Bible emphasizes the value of being under divine protection. The same fire that killed Nebuchadnezzar’s best soldiers as they approached the furnace was unable to harm the faithful Hebrews within the furnace (3:22,25).

Moreover, the king saw that fourth man who looked “like a son of the gods” (CSB, ESV, NASB). The King James Version renders the last phrase, “like the Son of God, capitalizing both “Son” and “God,” interpreting the phrase as a reference to Jesus.

Nebuchadnezzar approached the door of the furnace, unharmed by the flames. He declared the three Hebrew men to be “servants of the Most High God,” and ordered them to exit the furnace. The three men left the furnace, body and faith intact.

More importantly, their allegiance to God resulted in a royal decree for all people to honor their God (3:29).

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