

“A TEST OF FAITH”

Daniel 3:1-30

“A test of faith” refers to a difficult experience or challenge that reveals the depth and sincerity of a person's commitment to the Lord. By facing these challenges and not giving into despair or fear, a believer can strengthen their faith and their faithfulness to the Lord Jesus. The true test is not just what one says but the actions they take based on their beliefs. Here are some examples:

Hebrews 11:7... *By faith Noah*, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Hebrews 11:17–19... *By faith Abraham*, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; **18** *it was he* to whom it was said, “IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED.” **19** He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.

In our text tonight, we are presented with a major test of faith. It occurred approximately 2600 years ago in Babylon. Three young Jewish exiles—*Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah*—faced a major clash of worldviews with none other than the mighty Nebuchadnezzar. The pressure to compromise was overwhelming.

1. THE KING’S COMMAND

Daniel 3:1–7... Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, the height of which was sixty cubits and its width six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. **2** Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent word to assemble the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces to

come to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. **3** Then the satraps, the prefects and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates and all the rulers of the provinces were assembled for the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. **4** Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and *men of every* language, **5** that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. **6** "But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire." **7** Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language fell down *and* worshiped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Several years had passed since Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the subsequent interpretation. Evidently the king wanted to consolidate his kingdom and make sure his leaders were loyal. So, he gave the directive to build a huge golden idol on the plain of Dura. Surely it was a tribute to one of his gods, but it could also unite his kingdom religiously. Leaders were invited to be a part of the dedication ceremonies. Daniel's three friends who have been in the shadows up to this point are handed the "*show up or else*" invitation. At the sound of the music, everyone was to bow and worship the glittering golden idol or face certain death in the fiery furnace.

The orchestra began to play and people bowed the knee to the colossal idol that Nebuchadnezzar had fashioned. That is, all except three young Hebrew men. They didn't bow and believe me they stuck out like a sore thumb. Chaldeans rushed to tell Nebuchadnezzar and he got hot, no pun intended!

Somehow believers in America have bought into a watered-down version of the gospel. We have been led to believe that if we believe in Jesus everything is going to great. God will see to it that we are free from pain, discomfort, and

inconvenience. He will make our lives smooth and easy. Where did we get that? I like what John Ortberg said. . .

“Where did Jesus say to His followers, ‘God has a wonderful plan for your life, and that involves a great house, an attractive spouse, a terrific job, a wonderful car, and an endless succession of easy days?’”

He didn’t! Jesus did make these statements to His disciples:

Matthew 24:9... “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

John 15:18, 20... “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated you*. **20** “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”

Listen, you need to expect a clash of worldviews if you embrace Jesus as your Savior and the Bible as your final source for faith and practice.

2. THE DARING DEFIANCE

Daniel 3:8–12... For this reason at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and brought charges against the Jews. **9** They responded and said to Nebuchadnezzar the king: “O king, live forever! **10** “You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, and bagpipe and all kinds of music, is to fall down and worship the golden image. **11** “But whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire. **12** “There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up.”

What kept these three men from bowing and worshiping this golden idol? I would suggest to you that their commitment to the one, true God could be

traced back to their biblical training in Israel. Maybe their parents spent countless hours teaching the Law to them. The Ten Commandments had been committed to memory. They knew what was right and they knew what was wrong. Their values had been shaped much earlier than the incident on the Plain of Dura.

Don't forget how these young Jewish exiles were tested early on after they arrived in Babylon. They were selected, along with Daniel, to be a part of the king's court. They demonstrated their convictions to God and His Word.

This is the point where many modern believers crash and burn. They fail to prepare for these tests of faith that are sure to come. Then, when they are faced with the pressure to compromise, they have no firm values and no non-negotiable convictions. They are swallowed alive and end up bringing shame and reproach upon the name of our blessed Lord.

Listen, the time to prepare for a test of faith is NOW! Faith is not a spare tire that you only remove and use when you have a flat. Read the Word. Pray with renewed vigor. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. NOW, not when the test appears!

This brings us to the heart of this important chapter. I want you to see. . .

3. THE BOLD RESPONSE

Daniel 3:13–18... Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? 15 “Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace

of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" **16** Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. **17** 'If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **18** 'But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

The king was furious. Orders were sent out to bring the three Hebrews to him. Here we see an almost condescending tone as he gives them another chance. He assumed they either had not heard or they might have been confused. Now he made his commands abundantly clear—*bow or burn!* Make sure you don't miss that last little sentence—"what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"

The response of these three young Jewish men is classic. Notice, they did not try to be vague about their faith. They didn't try to strike a bargain with God—"God if you get us out of this, we will serve You forever." No, they just openly and courageously declared their faith in God. Oh, you are so right Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God is able!

When your faith is being tested and compromise is being pushed down your throat, you can't be all over the map. You can't stand on a wishy-washy faith. Your faith must be strong and vibrant, and YOU MUST DECLARE YOUR FAITH OPENLY!

Martin Luther was brought before the Roman Catholic hierarchy because of his unwavering stand on the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone. He was threatened to recant or else. Listen to his reply...

“My cause shall be commended to the Lord for He lives and reigns who preserved the three Hebrew children in the furnace of the Babylonian king. If He is unwilling to preserve me, my life is a small thing compared to Christ. Expect anything of me except flight or recantation. I will not flee, much less recant, so may the Lord Jesus strengthen me.”

4. THE SHOCKING PENALTY

Daniel 3:19–23... Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was altered toward Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. 20 He commanded certain valiant warriors who *were* in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego in order to cast *them* into the furnace of blazing fire. 21 Then these men were tied up in their trousers, their coats, their caps and their *other* clothes, and were cast into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire. 22 For this reason, because the king’s command *was* urgent and the furnace had been made extremely hot, the flame of the fire slew those men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. 23 But these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, fell into the midst of the furnace of blazing fire *still* tied up.

It was a moment of high drama. The furnace was heated up 7 times hotter than usual. They were bound up and thrown into the fiery furnace. The king’s soldiers were burned to crisp and lost their lives. However, these God-fearing young men kept the faith. They summoned up their courage and clung to their commitment to God—the true God.

Nebuchadnezzar was powerless against these courageous men. In his mind, human beings would do anything to save their hides. **He had no authority over these three men who were prepared to sacrifice their lives for what they believed!** Into the fiery furnace they were tossed!

5. THE AMAZING MIRACLE

Daniel 3:24–28... Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, “Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?” They replied to the king, “Certainly, O king.” **25** He said, “Look! I see four men loosed *and* walking *about* in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of *the* gods!” **26** Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!” Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. **27** The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king’s high officials gathered around *and* saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire *even* come upon them. **28** Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king’s command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.

Now you might assume that they didn’t suffer at all. You would be wrong. They suffered before they were thrown into the fire. Can you imagine the mental and emotional agony they experienced as they contemplated the price they would have to pay for their commitment to the Lord? This was the hardest test of faith they had ever faced. It was the definitive value decision!

God didn’t deliver them from the fire. He delivered them through the fire! Glory to God, the preincarnate Lord Jesus Christ showed up and showed out. No burns. No singed hair. No smell of smoke. No ruined clothes. What an amazing demonstration of the power of the one true God!

6. THE POWERFUL RESULT

Daniel 3:29–30... “Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish

heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.” 30 Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon.

God was glorified and these boys received promotions.

CONCLUSION

I want you to see that the question is not “if” you will ever have your faith tested. The question is “when” you will find yourself in a super-heated test of your faith. clash. Maybe yours will surface in the business arena as the organization pressures you to sacrifice your values for the company’s profit. Or, your test may arise out of some of your closest relationships, or in a youth athletic league, or in a college biology class. You believe in Jesus Christ, yet you are being asked to bow the knee to someone or something that is seeking to usurp the Lord’s place on the throne of your heart. How will you handle these strong challenges to your faith? John Lennox wrote. . .

“There is an important matter of principle here. God is a great deliverer—but he will not deliver us from having to make our own decisions. This is not because He is impotent but because He wants us to be strong. The development of our character depends crucially on the fact that we make responsible decisions before God for ourselves. For God to “decide” for us would be to de-humanize us and essentially turn us into amoral robots.... Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to make up their own minds as to whether they were going to put God first. That does not mean they had no guidance. Their guidance was all the accumulated experience of God’s trustworthiness up to that fateful moment. They therefore had decided to trust Him once more, no matter what it cost. Then God convincingly vindicated them. (Against the Flow: The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism, p. 147)

I fully expect believers in this nation to face the same persecution that believers the world over are bombarded with on a daily basis. Believe me when I say the pressure to compromise will only increase. Could it be one day that the “free

pulpit” we enjoy in America will be constricted by government regulations? Is it possible that one day the tax-exempt status of the local church could be rescinded? Will our fundamental biblical doctrines bring down the ire of those who espouse a humanist, post-modern worldview? Listen, the time to get ready is now.

Polycarp offered this prayer as he was being burned
at the stake:

"O Lord God Almighty, the Father of Thy beloved and blessed
Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge
of Thee, the God of angels and powers and of all creation and
of the whole race of the righteous, who live in Thy presence;

"I bless Thee for that Thou hast granted me this day and hour,
that I might receive a portion amongst the number of martyrs
in the cup of Thy Christ unto resurrection of eternal life,
both of soul and of body, in the incorruptibility of the Holy
Spirit.

"May I be received among these in Thy presence this day, as a
rich and acceptable sacrifice, as Thou didst prepare and
reveal it beforehand, and hast accomplished it, Thou that art
the faithful and true God.

"For this cause, yea and for all things, I praise Thee, I bless
Thee, I glorify Thee, through the eternal and heavenly High
Priest, Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, through whom with Him
and the Holy Spirit be glory both now and for the ages to
come. Amen.'

- From The Martyrdom Of Polycarp