

## **A Bold Faith**

**Winter Quarter: Faith in Action**

**Unit 2: A Living Faith in God**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of January 14, 2018**

**By Helen and Rev. Sam Rogers**

**Scripture Lesson: Daniel 3: 19-23; 26-28**

**Background Scripture: Daniel 3**

The account of the four young men from Judah continues in chapter 3. The training to serve the king has been completed, and they are assigned strategic positions of administration in the kingdom. Remember their names: Daniel (God has judged), Hannaniah (Yahweh has been gracious), Mishael (who belongs to God), and Azariah (Yahweh has helped). In their Babylonian royal education, their names have been changed to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The test of their faith in the matter of diet has been passed, but now another test comes for which there is no option available. A huge golden idol has been erected with the royal command to kneel down and worship. These Hebrew men refused, for to do so they would disobey the first two commandments of the Decalogue.

In this test, the focus is on Daniel's three friends. Speculation about Daniel's absence is almost endless. Our favorite is the place of honor Daniel held in the kingdom following the events recalled in chapter 2, where he interpreted the dreams of King Nebuchadnezzar. (By the way, the name of the golden idol was Nabu—the patron god of the king, whose name honored the god!)

The decree of the king demanded worship of the golden idol under the penalty of a horrific death for disobedience. With great fanfare, the people were called to fall to their knees in obedience.

When the three men refused to bow and worship, someone informed the king of their refusal. Jealousy may well have prompted the revealer! After all, these "foreigners" have taken important jobs and excelled in every way. There are always those who will take offense when someone else gets ahead! These people knew the nature of their king. They had witnessed his anger and harsh actions in other circumstances.

Previously, the king had been impressed when he had personally interviewed these candidates for royal service, but now he is confronted with their allegiance to Yahweh to the point of death. In one of the greatest declarations of faith the three men say:

O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

The confidence in God's power to save is tempered with their faith in God's ways, which do not always coincide with our wishes. They are saying, "God can, but even if he doesn't, we won't!" Wow! No wonder this lesson is entitled "A Bold Faith!"

Their answer enraged the king, and he immediately ordered their execution in a super-heated furnace—so hot several of his soldiers died in fulfilling the king's order. The three were wearing their regular clothes and were bound hand and foot when thrown in.

As the king watched, he saw not three, but four persons walking around in the furnace, unbound and unharmed. His description in Daniel 3:25 is: "a son of the gods." (NIV) He next shouts, calling them by name, to come out! Come here! *This order of the king they obey at once, and they are untouched by the flames—no sight or smell of fire!*

Again, there is great speculation about the identity of the fourth person in the furnace. Indeed, there are some who dogmatically declare the person was Jesus. Undoubtedly, this belief was generated by the King James Version of the Bible, where the phrase was translated as "Son of God." All modern versions, including the more conservative NIV, translates: "...the fourth looks like a son of the gods." However we determine the meaning, God, or a divine messenger, was present with them. The assurance of God's presence in great tribulation is one of the foundation stones of our faith.

Whatever we may think, the king turns from anger to awe and declares:

Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent an angel and rescued his servants.

In praising the God of the three men, Nebuchadnezzar still uses their Babylonian names, not their Hebrew names! For him, this god is just one more in the pantheon of gods.

We are living in a time when many competing loyalties batter us. The list is endless: gender, race, politics, industrial and financial conglomerates, environmental arguments, immigration issues, nationalistic loyalties, religion, and the list goes on. Where does our ultimate loyalty lie? What are we willing to risk to serve our gracious God?

The trust shown by these men even impresses the vindictive king. He recognizes something very special in them. He was surprised. We should not be! Looking back over our lives when have you seen God's hand guiding—even delivering—you?

When we served a church in Macon, Helen had a daily television program on the local Christian station, Good News Television. The format for the program included a guest who shared some aspect of their faith. As we were writing this lesson, she recalled one such person. The guest had received the news that she had terminal cancer, and had only a little while to live. She testified by using the words of the three men as a prayer: I know God can heal me, but if He doesn't, I know I will be secure in His love.

Two years later, she returned to the program with the testimony of healing. No matter the outcome, trust that the faithful God will see us through! As the anxious father said to Jesus in Mark 9:24: "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" Amen and amen!

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