

LifeWork Project

DANIEL: GOD'S ENABLING STRENGTH AND COURAGE

Full story in Daniel 3

STUDY

In this chapter we see the self-aggrandizement of an authority, King Nebuchadnezzar, who a short time earlier had acknowledged Daniel's God to be the absolute greatest of all. In fact, King N had gone so far as to command his people to offer sacrifices to this God. This was because the God Daniel served—the same God you and I serve today, 3,000 years later—had done the impossible for him by revealing Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its meaning.

But now, just a few years later, Nebuchadnezzar had made a golden statue of himself, ninety feet high and nine feet wide (just picture how high that is!), and was demanding that all his officials fall down at the sound of the trumpet and worship it. It's clear that he was serious about this, as he decreed that anybody who failed to fall down and worship would be thrown into a furnace—alive—and burned to death. There were likely several thousand of his officials around, as he had brought them from all over his kingdom, and with the threat of death by fire over everyone's head, all would no doubt comply; it would be crazy to disobey! Even if they weren't going to actually worship, why not simply fall down for the sake of appearance and be safe? So, when the trumpet sounded, all who were present fell down in the posture of worship—except for three seemingly crazy men—namely Daniel's friends. They had to be crazy, as only a crazy person would defy the King and remain standing at the risk of dying a painful death.

What would cause these men to do what they did? It was no doubt the question in many puzzled minds that day. The answer is that they were followers of the one and only God worthy of their worship. He was the God who had created everything that is, including the King; the God who had delivered His people from slavery in the beginning and had made a covenant with them, saying, "*You shall have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3). They were not going to desert this God—who is also our God today—and deny their faith by worshipping this golden idol! So they remained standing when all around them fell down.

In no time, of course, their stand was reported to the King, who, though angry, gave them a second chance. He liked them; maybe they had misunderstood. So they were offered a chance to live by denying their God and worshipping the statue of the King. What would they choose to do: stand firm in their faith and die, or obey the King and join the majority by falling down at the sound of the trumpet? They chose to stand alone, remain true to their God and their faith, and trust Him for the outcome.

This is what they said to the King:

“O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not worried what will happen to us. If we are thrown into the flaming furnace, our God is able to deliver us; and he will deliver us out of your hand, Your Majesty. But if he doesn’t, please understand, Sir, that even then we will never under any circumstance serve your gods or worship the golden statue you have erected.” (Daniel 3:16-18)

This polite, gracious, but uncompromising response so infuriated the King that he gave orders to heat the furnace to the max and have these guys thrown in. Both orders were carried out. If you read the story in the chapter cited above, you will know that the men were saved and lived to tell the tale.

So, what does all this mean to us here today, 3000-plus years later? Well, there’s a very powerful and encouraging message for us:

1. These men did not follow the majority. Instead, they stood tall for their God and experienced His enabling strength, even though they appeared crazy to others. God’s strength and courage are available to us too, should we face situations in our workplace or anywhere else where compliance with authority demands will mean the denial of Jesus and our faith. How do I know this? Because the God of Daniel and his friends is the God of today, and His commands and His promises have not changed. He will give us the courage we need; we just need to trust Him, obey, and be willing to lose the thing(s) we value—including our very lives, if necessary.
2. When push came to shove and they were given a second chance, they still did not yield, even though that would have been so easy. They stood firm, remaining true to their God and his commands. The same thing is expected from us today. We must never give in partway through and take the easy way out; we are in for the long haul and must persevere in trust and obedience. We can only do this with God’s help—all we have to do is ask for it!
3. They spoke up clearly, making sure the King understood that there was no chance they would ever comply with his demand, because their ultimate duty of obedience was to their God and not their employer the King. They explained that God was a God of power who is able to deliver; and they also explained that even if God let them die in the furnace, they knew He was trustworthy and they were not afraid, regardless of the outcome. We need to do this, too; we need to let people know why we are taking a stand—that we’re not just stubborn outliers, but people who worship, trust, and obey the one true God.
4. Not in all cases does God deliver people without any harm, as He did Daniel’s three friends; we leave that up to Him, because we trust Him. But in every case, He is there with us.

The final message is this: no matter what we stand to lose or gain, we respond with a resounding No if someone’s demand requires the denial of our God and his Son Jesus. This No can only be said and acted on with the help of our Lord and Master, who promised, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” He will always be there with us, enabling us.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. —Ephesians 6:10