

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-35 The Faithfulness of Daniel and His Friends

It's easy to be faithful to God when you are surrounded by godly friends in your own homeland. It's not so easy when you are a refugee far from home. It becomes harder when you find yourself surrounded by people who don't believe in God. This was the situation of Daniel and his three friends.

Jeremiah predicted that Judah would be invaded by Babylonian forces. In fact, it was invaded three times. The first time, they captured the king, robbed the Temple of many gold objects, and took away many young men. They forced the men to walk to Babylon—800 kilometers (500 miles) to the east—to work in the king's government. Daniel and three of his friends were among this group. They were taught the language and writings for three years. The king's goal was to use them in his royal court.

These four young men were far from home and family. They had to serve the king and were cut off from all public ceremonies of worship of the true God. They were even given new Babylonian names to cause them to forget their spiritual background, their nation, and their God.

They didn't forget, however. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and drink from his own supply. Perhaps this food was blessed by pagan priests before it was given to Daniel and his friends. Daniel wanted to stay away from this food. He made a decision not to defile himself with the royal food and wine. Instead, he asked for a simple diet of vegetables and water. The official in charge of the men was afraid that their health would decline. He feared being killed by the king for permitting this new diet.

Daniel liked this official and assured him that they would be even healthier with this new diet. "You won't be in any danger from the king," Daniel assured him. "Let us try it for ten days. Then compare us to the young men at court who eat the king's royal food." The official agreed to test them for ten days. After ten days, he determined that Daniel's requested diet was healthy for him, so he permitted the change in diet.

Not only were they healthier, but after three years of study, they appeared before the king. He tested their knowledge and found them more capable than any others. God helped them to gain knowledge and understanding of all kinds of writing and learning. In addition, God gave Daniel the ability to understand dreams and visions of all kinds. The king was so impressed with them that he assigned them important positions in his government.

Now this king was a tyrant. He could have anyone he chose killed without warning. Perhaps to unify his large empire under his authority, he set up an image covered with gold. He erected it out on a plain near the city. He then summoned leaders from all the outlying districts to assemble for the dedication of the image, which represented the chief god of Babylon. The king wanted everyone to believe that this god was the source and basis of the king's authority. He was clearly mixing Babylonian religion with his politics.

In front of the vast crowd, his official loudly proclaimed, "This is what you all are commanded to do: as soon as you hear the sound of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that the king has set up. Anyone who doesn't will immediately be thrown into a fiery

furnace and burned alive.” As soon as the music started playing, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold.

Some jealous court officials came forward and denounced the Jews. They accused Daniel’s three friends of refusing to bow before the image of gold. “You appointed these three Jewish men—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—to important government positions out in the provinces, but they pay no attention to you in this matter. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you set up.”

The king—tyrant that he was—flew into a rage! He had Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego arrested and brought before him. “Is it true,” he demanded, “that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? I’ll give you one more chance: when the music plays today, if you bow down before the image, very good. If you don’t bow down, you will be thrown into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you?”

The three men answered, “O king, we don’t need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If the God we serve decides to deliver us, then he will deliver us from the blazing furnace and from your wrath. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold image.”

The king grew even more furious. He ordered the furnace heated hotter still. He ordered strong soldiers to tie up the three Jewish men and throw them into the furnace. So they threw them in fully clothed. The fire burned so hot that it killed the strong soldiers who threw them in.

Then the king jumped up, alarmed. “Didn’t we throw three men into the fire? Look!” he said, “I see four men walking around in the fire. The ropes are gone, they are unharmed, and the fourth one looks like a son of the gods.” He moved a little closer to the furnace and called out, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

They came out, and the officials gathered around them in amazement. The fire had not harmed them, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their clothes were not scorched and they didn’t even smell like smoke.

The king exclaimed, “Praise be to the God of these three men. He sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted him and defied the king’s command. They were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I decree that anyone who says anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut into pieces. Their houses will be reduced to rubble. No other god can save in this way.” Then the king promoted the three faithful men to high positions in the province (Dan 3:1-30).

This story is **important** because it shows that God used Daniel and his companions to confront the pagan king of Babylon. He was able to capture them, take them to Babylon, and change their names. He was not able to change their allegiance to the God of Israel. May your faith in God be so strong that wherever you go, whatever your circumstances, you will be true to him!

The **main truth** of this lesson is that men and women of God can remain faithful to God, even when they are surrounded by a culture that serves other gods or serves no god. In the stories about Daniel, we see again God’s miracles in behalf of his people. They were in exile, but God had not forgotten them.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. How did Daniel and his friends end up in Babylon? [Pause]
A. If you said, “God allowed Babylon to punish Judah for its sinfulness, and hundreds of young Judean men were taken as refugees to Babylon,” you are correct.
2. What happened to them when Daniel requested a simple diet of vegetables and water? [Pause]
A. If you said, “God honored their faithfulness and they grew to be healthier than other men at court,” you are right.
3. Why did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow down and worship the image of gold? [Pause]
A. If you said, “They believed that there was no god but the God of Israel, and to worship the golden image was idol worship,” you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then tell someone else the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and re-tell it until you feel sure you are repeating the words and actions correctly.

Daniel and these friends were far from family and homeland, but their childhood in Judah with their families had taught them the ways of the LORD. Their spiritual training laid a foundation strong enough to sustain them during their years of captivity in Babylon. A good verse to memorize is Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.”