

## Daniel 3:16-30 - Preserved Through the Fire

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COURSE COMMENTARY



### 3:16-18 - Civil Disobedience

- **Trusting God's Sovereignty**

"But if not"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego understood the Scriptural teaching concerning **God's sovereignty**.

Their trust in God reflected the attitude of Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15).

As believers, how can we acquire a similar ability to face danger without compromise in our witness for God?

God's sovereign will varies with each **individual** (Acts 12:2,11; John 21:20-23; 2Ti. 4:17).

We will not be able to risk our lives in His service unless: (1) we are confident that we know the truth (God's Word, the Scriptures); (2) we place a higher priority on the truth than our own life. This, in turn, requires a heavenly and eternal mindset.

- **Idolatry**

To worship the golden image would have been to disobey the Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6; 23:24; 34:14; Deu. 5:8-9; Lev. 19:4; 26:1; Jos. 23:6-7,16; 2K. 17:35).

Idolatry continues in our own day in the form of worship of the **creation** in place of the **Creator** (Rom. 1:22-25).

Like Nebuchadnezzar, Antichrist will demand universal worship of himself and his image (2Th. 2:3-4; Rev. 13:4,8,12).

- **Civil Disobedience and the Christian**

The refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to worship the image is one of several examples within Scripture where God sanctions disobedience of an authority.

Three important principles apply when considering whether we can apply Biblical passages in support of civil disobedience in our own lives.

1. Separate the issue of civil disobedience found in a passage from the methods employed by the people involved.

2. Be sure the situation truly merits disobedience on our part because it would **personally** place us in a position of directly denying God's law.

3. Pay attention to the historical context of the passage. Do the principles involved equally apply to us, in our role and time, in the plan of God?

In this particular case, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were asked to violate one of foundational, universal, commandments in Scripture, included in the “top ten” spoken audibly to Israel (Ex. 20:1) and subsequently written by the finger of God upon stone tablets (Ex. 24:12; 31:18). This commandment applies to every believer in every age and in every geographical setting.

- **Lower Law vs. Higher Law**

The principle guiding Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego is referred to in our day as *higher law*.

Scripture teaches that believers are subject to the God-established civil authority (Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; 1Pe. 2:13, 17; cf. Gen. 9:6; Deu. 17:9-12; Ecc. 8:12). This is *lower law*.

Scripture also teaches that God has established certain laws governing individual behavior that no lower authority, such as a government, may contravene in the life of a believer. This is *higher law*.

When a lower authority enacts a law which would force the Christian to violate God’s law, then the higher law takes precedence and the believer must disobey the lower, civil law. Where these laws conflict, it is because the state has taken upon itself the things that are God’s alone.

## Man's Law or God's Law?



Balanced scales of justice, with Holy See emblem overlaid. Image courtesy of Ktr101, 2013. This image is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license](#).

- **Higher Law**

Scripture provides numerous examples of this principle of “higher law” at work. In every case, the people of God are called to obey God’s (higher) law rather than man’s (lower) law.

The Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh’s command to kill the male Jews (Ex. 1:16-21).

Moses’ parents disobeyed Pharaoh’s command to kill their male baby, Moses (Ex. 2:2). Referred to as an act of faith (Heb. 11:23).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to bow before the image King Nebuchadnezzar had set up (Dan. 3:13).

Daniel refused to stop his daily prayers to God (Dan. 6:10).

Mordecai refused to bow before Haman (Est. 3:2-4).

Peter and John defied the command of the Jewish religious leaders to no longer speak of or teach about Jesus. They reasoned, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge” (Acts 4:19).

Peter and the apostles defied the same command of the Jewish council a second time, responding, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Believers refuse to worship the beast and his image during the Great Tribulation (Rev. 13:15; 15:2; 20:4).

## 3:19-23 - Into the Fire

- **Will God Intervene?**

The consistent stand of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego as martyrs for their faith, was

tested to the point of **actual entry into the flames!**

Though the three friends had bravely asserted their willingness to die in this way, rather than bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image, still the actual experience of being bound and carried to the furnace would have been terrifying.

- **The Holocaust**

An unpleasant and immensely painful subject.

Two aspects of this delicate subject that must be seen in light of the Scriptures: (1) Satan opposes God's purpose for the nation Israel and employs spiritual forces in opposition to the survival of the Jews (Rev. 7:4-8; 12:4,17). (2) The OT predicts the severe experiences Israel would face if she disobeyed her God (Lev. 16:14-46; Deu. 28:15-68).

The suffering of Israel at the hands of her enemies in the OT is living proof of the reality of these ominous passages given by the hand of Moses. As history progressed, disobedience would intensify. In rejecting the Prophet Whom Moses predicted (Deu. 18:15-19; Acts 3:22-23), their Messiah Jesus Christ, Israel's disobedience reached a climax reflected by an equally terrifying passage from the NT (Mat. 27:22-25 cf. Luke 23:25-31).

Although responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus is not solely Israel's, it is impossible for the student of the Bible to view Israel's history without considering the suffering these judgment passages promise for disobedience to God. As difficult to accept as it may be, God's Word indicates this historic pattern will prevail until, following the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7 cf. Jer. 30:24; Deu. 4:30; Dan. 12:1,7; Mat. 24:21; Mark 13:19), Israel will ultimately acknowledge her Messiah (Mat. 23:39; Luke 13:35; Acts 3:19-21; Rom. 11:26-29).

"Israel must, indeed, be dumb if one asks them today: Tell me, pray: How can it be that the Eternal sent the fathers out of their land into captivity in Babylon for only seventy years, on account of all the abominations and idolatry by which they for centuries defiled the Holy Land:—and now Israel has been dispersed among all peoples for over eighteen hundred years, and Jerusalem, the city of the great King, is trodden down by the nations until this day? What, then, is the great and terrible blood-guiltiness which perpetually prevents you from dwelling in peace in the land of your fathers?—But Israel is not willing to know! And yet it is precisely its sin against its Messiah that is indeed the root of Israel's misery." --Eric Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, 1951), 118-119.

Another difficult topic related to the holocaust is the Scriptural teaching concerning the exclusivity of salvation through Jesus. In Daniel 3, we find the principle of the preservation of the Jewish nation in fulfillment of the plan of God. Yet, it cannot be said that every Jew who tragically perished during the holocaust received eternal life (Rom. 10:1-4). Only the faithful remnant, those who placed their faith in Messiah Jesus were saved (Amos 9:8-10; Zec. 13:8-9; Rom. 9:6, 27; 11:5; Gal. 6:16).

## 3:24-25 - Preserved in the Fire

- **A Fourth Individual**

If we recall the picture of the Old Lime Kiln (in the previous presentation), smelting furnaces could be quite spacious. The men were probably thrown in from the top. Nebuchadnezzar probably saw Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, and a fourth individual, through the lower opening.

Nebuchadnezzar describes the fourth individual as being "like the Son of God" לְבַר־אֱלֹהִים [l<sup>e</sup>bar-*ě*lāhîm], which lacks the definite article ("the").

## The Fiery Furnace

It appears that the Aramaic is saying that the individual appeared “god-like” from Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective: “like a son of the gods” (NASB95, ESV, HCSB, NIV); “like that of a god” (NET); “like a divine being” (TNK).



Three Youths in the fiery furnace (1776, Upper ikonostas village church). Image courtesy of [Wikimedia.org](#). Image is in the public domain.

### 1. An angel?

In favor of identifying the individual as an

angel is Nebuchadnezzar’s statement in Dan. 3:28 where he refers to the individual as an angel and the numerous passages in the OT where angels are referred to as sons of God (Gen. 6:2-4; Deu. 32:8 224; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). Also in favor of this identification is the subsequent delivery of Daniel in the lion’s den which is also said to be by an angel (Dan. 6:22).

### 2. The Angel of The Lord?

A mysterious figure who speaks in the first-person for God and even receives worship (Gen. 16:7-14; 22:11-15; 31:11-13; 32:28-30; Ex. 3:2-5; 23:20-23; Num. 22:35; Deu. 4:37; Jos. 5:13-15; Jdg. 6:11-24; 13:21-23; Hos. 12:3-5). Many believe that this special angel (messenger) was a preincarnate representation of the Second Person of the Trinity: Jesus Christ.

### 3. The Son of God?

Some passages in the OT refer to a unique individual as God’s Son (singular), who appears to differ from the angels (Ps. 2:7, 12; Pr. 30:4; cf. Dan. 7:13). Many Christian commentators believe this individual is the same as The Angel of the Lord.

In any event, it seems as if Nebuchadnezzar merely saw the individual as a “god-like being” -- terminology that could also describe an angel.

- **The Preservation of Israel**

The preservation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego within the furnace is a literal fulfillment of a promise given by Isaiah approximately 100 years earlier (Isa. 43:1-4).

This promise of preservation is addressed to **Jacob**, whom God named **Israel** (Gen. 32:28).

Several passages with similar promises do not concern a generic “people of God”. Rather, they make specific mention of **Jacob**, **Israel**, **Judah**, **Levites**, **the Jewish nation**, and the belief by Israel's enemies that God has cast them off (Mal. 3:6; Jer. 31:35-37; 33:14-26).

### Israeli Flag



Image courtesy of [Wikimedia.org](#). Image is in the public domain.

These strong promises to preserve Israel emphasize God’s intention to support the chosen nation. The promises also imply that history will be characterized by repeated attempts to displace Israel from the plan of God. Why else would such strong declarations be necessary?

- **A History of Persecution**

“The great Prussian Emperor Frederick often would test his chaplain with theological questions. Frederick, however, said he did not have time for long answers and explanations. He wanted simple answers that he

could comprehend quickly. One day he asked his chaplain if he could provide simple and succinct evidence for the truth of the Bible. Frederick asked if the chaplain could provide evidence in just one word. The wise chaplain responded that he could do just that. ‘What is the magical word?’ Frederick asked. The chaplain replied, ‘Israel, your majesty. The people of Israel.’” -- *Israel My Glory* (Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry) [www.foi.org], May/June 2002, 17

“I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of the people, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint.... According to the materialistic... criterion, this people ought long ago to have perished. Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews... their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history; all these point to the peculiar and mysterious foundations of their destiny. [Nicholas Berdyaev, “The Meaning of History” (London: Geoffrey Bles, Centenary Press, 1936), pp. 86-87]” -- Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology - The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries Press, 1989), 839-840

“No nation under heaven could touch Israel for ill without bringing down upon them the wrath of almighty God. The pages of history are strewn with the wreckage of nations who, though great in the eyes and councils of the world, incurred the just wrath of an outraged God. While God reserved the right to judge His chosen people for their sins, He also reserves the right to judge those who spitefully treat the Jews, and thus bring reproach on the One who made an everlasting covenant with Israel.” -- Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), 146

- **A History of Persecution (continued)**

“The survival of the people of Israel and of their culture over three millennia and in almost impossible conditions requires an explanation.... we have considered some biblical evidence for Israel's uniqueness. We have seen that Paul affirmed this uniqueness, grounding it in their special election which was not rescinded despite the refusal of many of the Jews to recognize Jesus as their Messiah.” -- Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Rome, Italy: Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano, 2000), 21

“The laws which govern the existence of many other peoples are in part explicable by the philosophy of history. But Israel's development mocks at all explanation. For, in spite of everything, Israel is Jehovah's people, and the Lord its God is a God Who hides Himself (Isa. 45:15). Every Jew is a walking mystery.” Erich Sauer, *The Dawn Of World Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, c1964, 1951), 119

“Jewish history is the visible, empirical act of revelation. It demonstrates to all who want to see that the God of Israel is not a philosophical concept, but the living God.” Jacob Jocz, *A Theology of Election*, p. 3 in John S. Feinberg, ed., *Continuity And Discontinuity* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 248

“Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.” -- God, Ps. 121:4

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego did not die a martyr's death, but they walked a martyr's path to overcome Nebuchadnezzar and his decree to worship the image (1Jn. 5:4-5; Rev. 2:10-11; 12:11; 15:2).

## 3:26-30 - Most High God

- **Superficial Repentance**

“Most High God” is אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהִים [’ēlāhā ’illā].

Elsewhere in Scripture, this phrase is a declaration of God as the only true God, in contrast to lesser gods that are not gods at all (Gen. 14:18-20,22; Num. 24:16; Ps. 46:4; 50:14; 57:2; 73:11; 78:35,56; 107:11; Dan. 3:26; 4:2; 5:18,21; Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Acts 16:17; Heb. 7:1).

In the mouth of Nebuchadnezzar, it merely means: “the highest of the gods” among the numerous gods recognized by Babylon's pagan culture.

- **Yielding Our Bodies**

They gave up their lives rather than disobey God's command against serving or worshipping any other God.

The consistent teaching of Scripture is that our relationship with God is more precious than life itself.

God's Word also tells us the world will pass through a time of great darkness before the bright and glorious dawn of the Millennium. During that time, many of God's people will share the dilemma of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Having overcome the world through faith in the True Overcomer, Jesus Christ (1Jn. 5:4-5), believers are called to obey and serve to Him whether in life (Rom. 12:1) or in death (Mat. 10:28; Luke 21:16-19; Rev. 2:10; 12:10-11).

Thankfully, God has given us numerous examples, in whose footsteps we are to follow, if need be: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; Daniel (Dan. 6:16); Esther (Est. 4:16); Paul (Acts 20:23-24; 21:13-14; Php. 1:19-20; 2:17; 2Ti. 4:6); and even Jesus (Mat. 26:39; Luke 22:42).

The promotion of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego served to advance the cause of their Jewish countrymen for the remaining years of their captivity under Babylon. Following the Great Tribulation, those who remained true to God are promoted to positions within the millennial government (Rev. 20:4).

## Application

- Persecution Serves God's Purpose
- Church and State
- Against Situational Ethics
- Exclusivity of the Christian Worldview
- Fallen Man's Response to Revelation
- Learning to Stand on Our Own
- Our Reason for Living
- God is Sovereign

### Principles for Living

