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## SESSION TWO

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# Protection in the Furnace

### SESSION SUMMARY

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God alone is worthy of our allegiance, devotion, and worship. In the midst of opposition, persecution, and threats to our lives, we trust the One who is able to deliver and sustain us. In this session, we see three exiled men who refused to participate in the idolatry of their captors. Trusting that God is sovereign and good, they were confident in His protection. One of the ways we display the glory of God today is by obeying Christ, no matter the consequences.

### SCRIPTURE

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Daniel 3:8-30

# THE POINT

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**God alone deserves our ultimate allegiance.**

## INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

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### Option 1

In Philippians 1:21, the apostle Paul wrote, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” In other words, “If I live I get Christ. If I die I get more of Christ. Either way, I win!”

A martyred missionary to the Huaorani people group, the Auca Indians, Nate Saint (1923-1956) saw his life this way. He wrote: “The way I see it, we ought to be willing to die. In the military, we were taught that to obtain our objectives we had to be willing to be expendable. Missionaries must face that same expendability.”<sup>1</sup> This sense of expendability should not only belong to missionaries, but also to every follower of Jesus.

This way of looking at life and death—of realizing both are in God’s hands—must have been familiar to the three Hebrew men we encountered in the previous session: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Taken captive to Babylon in 605 B. C., their names were changed to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In today’s session, we don’t simply see these men display “courage under fire,” but “courage *in* the fire!”

- **What do you think it would look like for you to live like “living is Christ and dying is gain”?**
- **How would your life look different if you looked at life and death as Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did—both in God’s hands and under His authority?**

### Option 2

*Allegiance.* This word isn’t one we hear often today. The United States has a Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, which contains the line, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America...” Those who say Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag are instructed to be respectful. There is even a “Flag Code” that dictates how the Pledge should be said. This code calls for the highest level of respect: people stand facing the flag, with the right hand placed over the heart. Military personnel must silently face and salute the flag as the pledge is said.<sup>2</sup> *All of this for a flag.* But to the United States, the flag represents a united nation and respect for what it took to get to that point. The Pledge is meant to be a symbol of devotion and commitment, a statement that aligns the people with their country, and a promise to stand with it no matter what.

In the same way, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had pledged their allegiance to God. Despite being taken in captivity to a foreign land and being ordered to worship something other than God, they stood firm with God. They knew that no matter what the consequences, their hearts belonged to God and they would not bow to or express their allegiance to any other authority.

- **What do you think it means to express allegiance to God?**
- **Describe how you might react if you had to choose between following God or an earthly leader.**

# HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

## THE POINT

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**God alone deserves our ultimate allegiance.**

## CHARACTERS

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- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah** - Daniel's Hebrew friends who were also taken captive; renamed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

## PLOT

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During our last session we were introduced to a young man named Daniel and three of his Jewish friends. These young men were taken to Babylon as captives after Jerusalem's fall. God blessed their faithfulness during the exile, granting them wisdom and favor in the sight of high government officials in a foreign land. In this session, we witness the faithfulness of these young men as they refused to participate in the Babylonians' idolatry, and we also see God's willingness to spare them from their enemies.

## TIMELINE

**TESTED BY FIRE**  
*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trust God for protection.*

**WALL OF HANDWRITING**  
*Warning of God's judgment and the need to repent.*

**A FUTURE KING**  
*Isaiah tells of a future king coming from the line of David.*

## NEBUCHADNEZZAR BUILDS AN IDOL

King Nebuchadnezzar once paid homage and praise to Daniel's God (2:46-47), but his devotion was shallow and short-lived. In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar set up a great statue that was 90 feet tall with a width of 9 feet, gold plated from head to toe (3:1).

The biblical writer went to great lengths to note the idolatrous nature of this statue of gold. The word "image" occurred more than 10 times in chapter 3, and as you know, God's people were forbidden to worship graven "images" of any sort (Ex. 20:4).

So how would the Jewish exiles respond to the king's decree to bow down to this statue? Let's take a look:

**Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! You, O king, have made a decree, that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These men, O king, pay no attention to you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Dan. 3:8-12)**

When the time came to bow down and worship the image as commanded by the king, three men remained standing (v. 12). There was no fanfare or outburst of protest, just a quiet act of civil disobedience. Quickly, the enemies of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego sprung into action, accusing them before the king.

Notice the enemies' tactics here. They asked the king if he saw what these young men did—or rather didn't do. First, "they pay no attention to you." (They don't respect you.) Secondly, "they do not serve your gods" (On this one, the enemies were correct!) Third, "They do not...worship the golden image that you have set up." (Right again!) In essence, the enemies accused the Jewish men of failing to give ultimate allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar.

So it would appear that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in a no-win situation. The critics came out in the open, they carefully called out the king, and he had to do something to save face. The future did not look bright for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

## GOD'S PEOPLE REFUSE TO BOW TO THE IDOL

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In light of the situation they faced, how would these young men respond to the charges against them? What would they do? Or, more importantly, what would God do next?

**Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with fury, and the expression of his face was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He ordered the furnace heated seven times more than it was usually heated. And he ordered some of the mighty men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their cloaks, their tunics, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace. (Dan. 3:13-23)**

Nebuchadnezzar was furious. The three Jews resisted the herd mentality and bravely stood alone (apparently Daniel was not present). The king commanded that they be brought before him (v. 13). He asked if the accusations were true that they would not serve his gods or “worship” the golden statue he set up (v. 14).

Before allowing them to answer, the king gave them a second chance (v. 15). Maybe he suspected they were accused by jealous rivals. Perhaps he genuinely liked them and was looking to provide them a way out of this political mess. If they would simply repent of disobeying the king, bow down, and worship his idol, all would be well and good. But if they did not, they would be immediately burned alive in the fiery furnace.

Then Nebuchadnezzar asked the question that is the key to the entire episode: “And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” In other words: “If you are so foolish to ignore my gracious offer, who is going to save you?”

The three Jews were glad he asked. The answer to that question had been settled in their hearts long ago. If challenged to worship the gods of this world and be praised or to worship the One true and living God and be burned to a crisp, they would follow God. Regardless of what the immediate outcome might be, three things were clear: First, God's servants would only bow down to Him and no one else; Second, God's servants would trust in God's sovereign purposes no matter what; Third, God's servants would trust in God's power and protection, leaving what would happen to His providential plan.

## GOD SHOWS UP AND PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE

These young men weren't sure how their situation would unfold. Would God spare them? Or would God allow the evil directed against them to continue? Yet, despite not knowing how God would respond, the young men stood firmly in the belief that God is in control, no matter the end result. Let's see how the story ends.

**Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.(Dan. 3:24-30)**

So, the three Hebrews were bound and tossed into the furnace, fully clothed (v. 21). Nebuchadnezzar and his loyal, pagan, idolatrous subjects sat back and watched what would certainly be an object lesson for all who tried to go against the king's commands.

## TIMELINE

### **DANIEL IS DELIVERED**

*God protects Daniel in the lions' den.*

### **THE JOURNEY HOME**

*God keeps His promise to bring His people home.*

### **REBUILDING THE TEMPLE**

*Despite immense opposition the temple is rebuilt.*

But something unexpected happened. The king himself was shocked and jumped out of his seat (v. 24). The men did not die. In fact, they were no longer bound, but were walking around as if being in a fiery furnace did not harm them (v. 25). Second, and more importantly, there were four men walking around in the furnace and the fourth had the appearance “the appearance...is like a son of the gods.”

Nebuchadnezzar invited the three Jewish men out of the furnace for all to see that the fire had brought no bodily harm to them (v. 27). In fact, there was no evidence that these men were in the furnace: no singed hair, no burnt clothes, and not even the scent of fire. The king rightly attributed this to their God (v. 28), the God he called “the Most High God” (v. 26), and earlier called “God of gods and Lord of kings” (2:47).

- **What are some other examples in Scripture where we see God being a Savior who draws near to His people during their time of need?** (See Ex. 3:6,12; Isa. 43:2; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 8:37-39; Heb. 13:5; 1 Pet. 4:12-14). (p. 18, PSG)

## 99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

### Church and Kingdom (p. 18, PSG)

*The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the reign of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, in anticipation of the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's mission is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the gospel through good works, so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.*

## CHRIST CONNECTION

When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fiery furnace, he saw four men instead of three. He said the fourth “the appearance...is like a son of the gods” (v. 25). Later he said he was an “angel” (v. 28). That was not a bad guess for a pagan polytheist. However, we know better. The fourth person in the furnace was the One we know as *Immanuel*, or *God with us*. The One who walked with them in and through the fire is also the One who walked through the very fires of hell on our behalf, that we too would not have a single cell of our souls singed by the flames we actually deserve.

The reason we can have confidence while in the furnace of affliction is because we trust in the power and presence of God. Knowing God is with us brings encouragement, joy, and hope to our souls. May God give us courage in the fire to represent the One who has delivered us from an eternal fire, a fire He endured in our place.

# YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

## GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some areas of life in which Christians are criticized for obeying God rather than culture or popular opinion?** *Answers may include areas such as morals (for instance, following what God has to say about physical intimacy in a relationship versus what culture deems appropriate), the means of salvation (the Bible is clear in that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, on the basis of what Jesus has accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection), and so forth.*
- **What are some ways Christians can demonstrate to their surrounding culture that their ultimate allegiance is to God, not men?** *Answers may include the importance of speaking God's truth through their words and affirming God's truth through their actions.*
- **What can we learn from the Jewish men's confession of faith when they claimed they would follow God even if He chose not to deliver them?** *The central truth we learn from their confession is that obedience and faith in God are not dependent upon whether or not things turn out the way we want.*
- **What does this account teach us about the character of God and His relationship to His people? How does this encourage you as you face difficulties in your own life?** *Answers will vary.*

### HIS STORY

*God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.*

### YOUR STORY

*Where your story meets His.*

# YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



## HEAD

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Theologians have long debated the identity of the fourth individual in the furnace. Some believe this is a *theophany*, or a *manifestation of God's presence*. Others call this a *Christophany*, or a *preincarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God*. Regardless, the important thing to note is that the Lord was there with them. The God who did not deliver them from the fire was the God who met them *in* the fire and delivered them out of the fire.

- **When has God chosen not to deliver you from a trial, and instead met you in the midst of the trial?** *While answers will vary, help students to sense the weight of the point behind the question—God doesn't necessarily promise that we won't face trials, but He does promise to be present with us in the midst of them.*
- **What is the impact of sensing God's presence when you face difficulties?** *Answers will vary.*



## HEART

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It's hard for us to identify with Nebuchadnezzar in this account, but maybe we should. Do we not sometimes exalt ourselves in similar ways? Do we not often act as if matters of destiny are in our hands and not God's? Do we not draw attention to who we are, who we know, and what we have done? Is the same pride that is in the heart of this king not lurking in our own? When we are honest with ourselves, we will come to the conclusion that we also have pride within our own hearts and that this pride causes us to trust in ourselves rather than in the God of our salvation.

- **In what areas of your life have you played the role of Nebuchadnezzar?** *The point behind this question is to get students to think of areas in which they tend to be less reliant upon God and more reliant upon themselves. It is one thing to be reliant upon God during the tragedies of life, but what about relying upon God in the seemingly small, everyday events?*
- **How does the faith of these young Jewish men encourage you when it comes to dealing with pride in your own heart?** *Answers will vary.*



## HANDS

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Honoring and obeying God is not always popular. Sometimes, allegiance to God leads to serious problems and, in many cases, life-threatening situations. While the latter may not often be your experience, it is a daily reality for many of our brothers and sisters around the world. Simply trying to live a life that is faithful to the God and Savior they love, these believers are criticized, ostracized, and hated. Still, they declare by words and actions that we obey God above men (Acts 5:29).

- **How does this account help us remain strong in faith as we seek to follow Jesus today?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways we can encourage and support brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who face intense opposition to their faith?** *Answers might include praying for them; supporting them financially; speaking out on their behalf, even when others won't, and so forth.*

## ► ADDITIONAL INFO

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### SOURCES

1. Marvin J. Newell, *Expect Great Things: Mission Quotes that Inform and Inspire* (Pasadena: William Carey Library Publishers, 2013), 51.
2. “The Pledge of Allegiance,” *US History.org*, accessed May 10, 2016, <http://www.ushistory.org/documents/pledge.htm>.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to [lifeway.com/TGPWIN17Dan](http://lifeway.com/TGPWIN17Dan))**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

**[GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources](http://GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources)**

And for **free online training** on how to lead a group visit

**[MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject](http://MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject)**