

# STRANGERS + EXILES: TRIAL BY FIRE

May 7, 2017 | Pastor Randy Remington

Daniel is a great book in so many ways, but as we head into the later chapters we know there is so many views, perspectives and opinions. Nevertheless, we will continue to identify the major themes and truths located in this book; they are very relevant today in our time and culture as they ever were.

King Nebuchadnezzar looked over his vast empire and realized that he needed to consolidate. He attempted to bring together the different peoples, belief's and cultures and turn the exiles into Babylonians.

So the king addresses both the political and religious arenas in one fell swoop. He built a 90-foot-high gold statue of himself that was 9 feet wide. The people were notified when the music began they were to bow before the statue. But, there were three young men who refused to bow and that's where our passage begins.

*"Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"*

*Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King 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 deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*

*Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.*

*Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"*

*They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."*

*He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

*Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!"*

*So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.*

*Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."*

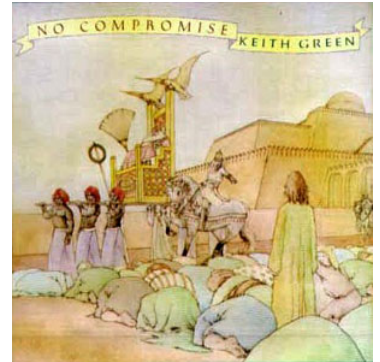
*Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon." (Daniel 3:13-30)*

This golden image may have been influenced by his dream that Daniel interpreted; but the bible doesn't say.

This statue, this image represented and symbolized everything Babylon was, its power, its belief system, etc. Babylon, for us, becomes what you bow down to; it is what defines your life.

This is not confined to ancient cultures. It's not the same, but even our nation finds its identity in items like the Statue of liberty, the National Anthem, etc. Even today this is still very much alive in our culture, we see it when a person refuses to acknowledge our flag, our anthem. But this is that, multiplied many times.

Keith Green was a great Christian singer and song writer who put out this album.



The message of his songs and other Christian artist address this issue of never bowing down.

We have brothers and sisters in the world that will not bow down and it is costing them their lives. For us we make daily, smaller decisions about what we bow to or not.

This points us to understanding what "culture" really is:

- **Cult:** a system of religious devotion (worship) directed toward a particular figure.
- **Culture:** is derived from how and what people worship.
- **Counter-Cultural:** a subculture whose values and norms of behavior differ substantially from those of mainstream society, often in opposition to mainstream cultural mores.

They are saying;

"just go along with this"

"don't make waves"

"just bow then do whatever you want"

"we don't care what you do in private"

### **Pluralistic Societies: Assimilate into culture by privatizing your faith.**

Basically we realize that they don't care what you do in private. But if it's in public, they will care and there will be consequences.

So it would be wise to ask ourselves, If I don't bow and conform:

- Will it cost me in my profession?
- Will it affect me with friends, peers or co-workers?
- How about with family?
- Promotions and raises in a company?
- Maybe with our neighbors?

***"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." (Daniel 3:17-18)***

Notice their expression of faith, it's so precise, it's not conditional on what he does or doesn't do. They are saying, we trust God, we love God no matter what, It's not because of what he does but for who he is. Like these three men, we become **"Spiritually Fireproof"**.

**"A faith that's tested is a faith that can be trusted."**

SO LET'S LOOK AT THIS IN THREE IMPORTANT THINGS WE SEE HERE:

- **THE INEVITABILITY OF SUFFERING:**

*"Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward." (Job 5:7)*

*"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." (1 Peter 4:12)*

- **SUFFERING RELATES TO YOUR CHARACTER LIKE GOLD DOES TO FIRE.**

*"In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:7)*

It is during these times we find out who we really are. Things happen in our character, there is a shaping that can't happen any other way. The result, "praise, glory and honor" to Jesus our Lord.

- **JESUS WILL BE WITH YOU IN THE FIRE**

*"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." (Isaiah 43:2)*

Jesus didn't deliver them from the furnace, but he met them in the fire. In a sense we're saved in the furnace, not from the furnace.

**"When your faith and God's faithfulness intersect, God shows up in miraculous ways."**

**The way that God saves!**

***"Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, FOR NO OTHER GOD CAN SAVE THIS WAY." (Daniel 3:29)***

Many times, God will use these periods when we're going through the fire to display his grace and salvation. As we read this story, I'm certain countless people were deeply touched and influenced by the actions of these three men. People around us will also be swayed, even persuaded by followers of Jesus walking in faith and trust in the most difficult of situations

### **A Prayer**

Lord, may we never bow to anything or anybody but you. May we never just "go along to get along". We do not want to be defined by anyone or anything other than you and your Word. God give us the grace to go through the fire and suffer the consequences of not bowing to things in our culture. We bow only to you and we love, trust and worship only you. This love and trust is not based on what you may or may not do, but our lives are in your hands Oh Faithful One. We will not hide our faith in our private place, but will let your light shine through us as we carry out your command to disciple all nations.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We know that King Nebuchadnezzar looked over his vast empire with diverse exiles and realized that he needed to consolidate. His goal was to make "Babylonians" out of the exiles. What are some of the cultural pressures you have observed or experienced around you? What were they trying to make you or others become?
2. We know that we have brothers and sisters around the globe, who are refusing to bow down and it has cost them their lives. What are some things that that you've seen or experienced where you or others around you refused to bow? Was there consequence for not bowing, if so what was it?
3. Take another look at you notes on page 4. Discuss the difference and connection between "cult", "culture" and "counter-culture".
4. Also on page 4, please discuss the implications of this quote: "Pluralistic Societies: Assimilate into culture by privatizing your faith"
5. What a powerful statement of faith and trust we see in verses 17-18. Please take a few minutes and consider these verses again. What do they tell us about these men, about unconditional faith and how it relates to us as we walk through our own furnace times?
6. Please discuss these 3 points that Pastor Randy laid out for us:
  - The inevitability of Suffering
  - Suffering relates to your character like gold does to fire
  - Jesus will be with you in the fire
7. If you have time, starting on the bottom of page 6, I wrote my own personal prayer based on today's teaching. You don't have to cover the entire teaching but would you write a prayer to God concerning one or several of the things we learned today.