

## Heroes of Old #2 – Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego

In this series we are looking at some Old Testament stories of people who faced fears and overcame them in a big way.

The **key verse** for this series is 2 Timothy 1:7, “*For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.*” He has not given us a spirit of fear, and yet, so many people are paralyzed by fear.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were three young men who faced one of the most fearful situations you can imagine. But, God had not given them a spirit of fear, and we are going to see how God uniquely delivered them, and I pray it will speak to all of us.

This all happened in the third year of King Jehoiakim’s reign. He was the king of Judah when Babylon, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, attacked and conquered Judah.

And after they conquered Judah King Nebuchadnezzar did what he usually did after they conquered a nation, he had his people find the very best of that nation and bring them to Babylon.

He would do was take the **smartest and best educated** and indoctrinate them in the Babylonian culture. They would feed them their food, teach them their language and history and have them worship their gods. The Babylonians set about to change everything, even their names.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were not their birth names. Their birth names were all related to Jehovah. We would say, in our time, they had Christian names. The Babylonians changed their names so that they referred to the Babylonian gods instead of Jehovah. (Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah)

It would be like a Christian named **David** being captured and they changing his name to **Mohammed**. What they wanted was that every time they called them by name they would think of the Babylonian gods instead of Jehovah. **And that’s a lot like the way our spiritual enemy works today.**

Instead of hearing what God wants us to hear, our spiritual enemy wants us to hear what he has to say about us. And maybe you can relate. All your life, you’ve heard some lies about yourself and you start to believe them.

Maybe you've heard people say, "You're never going to amount to anything," and after you've heard it enough, you start to believe it. "You're not good enough. You're stupid. You're a loser." And you've heard it over and over again, and you start to believe it.

I have a sister that is 10 years younger than me; she is the only girl among us kids. Her name is **Marydeth** but mom & dad always called her "sissy" and, of course, so did I and my two brothers. And as we got older we shorted that to "Sis." And when our kids came along they called her **aunt Sis**.

When she first started school, they, of course, used her real name, but Mary thought "Sis" was her real name and she referred to "Marydeth" as her "school name" but she thought of herself as being "Sis."

Now, why did she think her name was "Sis"? Because she heard it over and over again and so she came to believe that was her name. Okay, back to our story. Daniel 3:1, "*King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide.*" Man, that is a huge idol, and it was made out of gold.

Maybe old Nebuchadnezzar was a little guy and he was trying to compensate. You know how it is. **Big truck, little man.** Who knows what this is all about, but whatever it was about old king Nebby was deadly serious.

Here is the proclamation he had made. "*The herald loudly proclaimed, "This is what you are commanded to do: As soon as you hear the sound of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up."* Daniel 3:4-5

So, they have this huge idol and everyone is told that whenever they hear the band play they have to fall down and worship it.

And what if you don't fall down and worship it **what happens?** Verse 6, "*Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.*" King Nebuchadnezzar told the whole kingdom to bow down, and everyone did except for three men: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

To say the king was not happy about this is putting it mildly. Verse 13-15, "*Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego ...and said to them, "Is it true...that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now when you hear the sound 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?"*

**Key thought:** A faith that is tested by fire is a faith that can be trusted. So, here is a question for you to consider, “*Can your faith handle the fire?*” because honestly, a lot of people can’t.

They have kind of a pseudo faith, a pretend faith, a faith light. Ask yourself, “*Can your faith handle the trial of an **unanswered prayer**?*” Let’s say you pray and you pray, and you believe with everything in you God will answer that prayer, and He doesn’t. Can your faith handle the fiery trial of an unanswered prayer?

“*Can your faith handle loss, **loss of possessions**, loss of your **health**, loss of **someone** that you love?*” “*What happens when you want to **conceive** a child and you can’t, or when your child is born and then **doesn’t live**?*”

“*What happens when someone you love is **taken in a car wreck**?*” Can your faith handle the fiery trials of life, because the truth is, a faith that is tested by fire is a faith that can be trusted.

Think a minute about these guys. These young men were just like you. They had dreams and hopes for the future, and they wanted to live. And all of a sudden, they are faced with an unbelievable choice.

All you have to do is bow down this one time. Just like everyone else, bow down and worship this idol, and then everything is cool. But if you don’t do this one thing, **its game over and you die.**

Burned alive. What would you do? Most likely in my mind I would quickly start rationalizing all the reasons why it’d probably be a **good idea** to worship the idol.

I would think, “*Okay, now I’m here to **make a difference** in these Babylonian’s lives, and I want to help expose them to Jehovah, and if I’m dead, I can’t do that. So, it might be better to bow down just this once,*” and I’m thinking, “I’ll still worship God. I won’t really worship their god. I’ll worship my God in my heart, and then surely, God will understand.”

It’s easy to start sliding toward rationalization. The problem is: when we rationalize one time, we can rationalize two times, and so on, and before long, we are simply living a life of compromise.

What do we do when our faith is tested by fire? The lives of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teach us **three things.**

## **1. We must always obey God's commands instead of man's expectations.**

Verse 16, The king said, "Bow down or you're dead."

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "*O King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.*" (16) Why not? Because they had already made up their minds.

Long before the fire was ever burning, **they already had a plan**. And what was their plan? Their plan was obedience. Long before the issue ever arose, they planned to obey God. Notice what they didn't do. They didn't say, "**Can you give us a little time to think about this? Can I take some time to pray about this?**"

**"Now, hang on. I need to make a list of the pros & cons and decide which is going to be better."** But, you know, if we just go by the pro's and con's, there may be times where there is only one pro, and that is to obey God, and the list of con's are long. That's why when the con's outweigh the pro's, and the pro is to obey God, **you always go with obeying God.**

Just looking at the pro's and the con's can lead you into a life of compromise. "**We don't have to talk about this, king; we've already made up our minds. Doesn't matter what you say. Doesn't matter what you do. We have a plan, and our plan is to obey God no matter what.**"

Now maybe you are are thinking, "*Just this once. It won't be a big deal. God will understand.*" No, no, no. We always obey the commands of God, never the expectations of men. We compromise once, we compromise twice, and before long, we are living a life of compromise. We must obey God and not men.

**2.** Next, when our faith is tested by fire we do this and this is so important. **We must believe God's truth instead of the facts.** Now, you may say, "*What's the difference.*"

Daniel 3:17, The king said, "*Bow down and worship,*" and they said, "*If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king.*"

What did they say? "**The God we serve.**" Now, notice. It wasn't the god we've heard about, or the god that our friends serve, or the god that we read about in a book, but the God that we serve, the God that we know, the God that we've been in fellowship with, the God that we've trusted, the God that we know first-hand.

*“The God we serve is able to save us from it and rescue us from your hand.”* That’s the difference between believing just the facts and believing the truth.

**What were some of the facts?** The king said, *“Bow down”*. Fact: They didn’t do it. Fact: The king was angry and build a big fire. Fact: Everyone thrown into it was burned to a crisp. Fact: The king was about to throw them into it.

But there is another Fact: **Our God will deliver us**. There we have truth. We don’t just believe the facts, but also the truth. We see all sorts of **examples in the Bible**. The fact is, it is humanly impossible to **walk on water**. The truth is, Jesus did, and so did Peter.

The fact may be that you’re out of money and in **financial trouble**. The truth is, Jesus is your provider. The fact may be that the doctor says there is no **hope**. The truth is, Jesus is the great physician.

The fact may be that your **marriage is in trouble**. The truth is that God is a God of **restoration**. We don’t just look at the facts, but also at the truth. The fact may be that you feel very far from God. The truth is, He is **pursuing you** right now!

The truth is; He’s working in all things to bring about good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. **Distinguish** between the facts and the truth. Fact is; you **may have three cats**. Truth is; God loves you, anyway. That’s just how big of a God that He is.

We don’t just believe what we see. We believe what He says. We don’t just believe the facts. We believe the truth.

**3.** What do you do when your faith is tested by fire? We obey God’s commands instead of man’s expectations. We believe God’s truth instead of the facts. And number three, **we believe God**.

We don’t just believe **in** God. We believe Him. According to **Newsweek**, ninety-one percent of Americans believe in God but can you tell there is a huge difference in believing **in** Him and believing Him.

If nine out of ten Americans believed God, and took His word seriously, can you imagine how different our country and this world would be?

That’s the way a lot of us were raised. We’d go to church, and we knew the drill. We would stand up when we were supposed to and sit down when we were supposed to.

Then we would **sing hymns**, verses 1, 2 & 4, never 3. Don't know what was wrong with 3, but we never sang verse 3. The pastor would speak; we would sing 1, 2 & 4 then shake his hand on the way out.

We would then go to lunch and forget about it all week. We believed **in** God, but we didn't believe Him, because His truth did not affect our lives during the week.

**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** didn't just believe in Jehovah, but they believed Him enough to put it all on the line. They said, "*We believe that our God is able to rescue us, and we believe that He will.*"

They said, God is able and He will. Look at what they said next, verse 18, "*God is able and he will, **but even if He does not**, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you've set up.*"

We believe He can. We believe that He will, but even if He does not ..." That is the deepest form of faith. It is the faith of "**no matter what.**"

*"If we lose our job and we don't know what to do, we will still believe God, no matter what."* "If we pray for our kids and they don't stop going the wrong way, we will still believe God no matter what."

*"If we pray, and we believe that God will answer our prayer, but He doesn't, we will still believe God no matter what."* "If we're praying for someone to be **healed** and they are **not healed**, we'll still believe God no matter what."

If someone, even a Christian, that we love and respect, betrays us and hurts us, we will still believe God no matter what. If we hurt, if we are afraid, if we feel alone, if we are persecuted, we will still believe Him no matter what.

**No matter what.** That's real faith. No matter if His word makes me uncomfortable, I will do what He says. No matter if everybody else is making fun of me, no matter if all my friends say, "*You are a freak, Jesus boy,*" no matter what.

No matter if the people at my **job** make fun of me because I make a stand, no matter if my **boyfriend breaks up** with me because I won't sleep with him anymore. No matter what, I do not obey what people say. I obey what God says.

No matter what. No matter when I am so alone and don't know what's going to happen, and I am afraid. No matter what, I still worship Him, because He is still God. No matter what I feel, no matter what I see, **I do not live by feelings.** I live **by faith**, no matter what, I will worship Him.

There are too many people who believe **in** Him, but do not believe Him, and that is not real faith, and the moment you get hurt, or something happens, or somebody in church is not nice to you, you are going to leave the church and leave the faith.

If that is you, you never really had faith. You believed **in** God, but you don't believe God. When you believe Him, you believe Him no matter what. *"Take my life. Take everything that matters to me. I will still worship, because I believe in who You are no matter what."*

**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** said, *"We believe God can. We believe He will, but even if He doesn't, you need to know this. We belong to Him and we will worship no other god."* King Nebuchadnezzar says, *"Fine. Fair enough. Have it your way, boys. Turn the fire up. Heat it up seven times."* The fire was hot before. It is now Seven times hotter.

He said, *"Get the strongest guards to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them in the fire."* The heat was so intense that **it killed the soldiers** who threw them in, but it didn't kill Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

*Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."* Daniel 3:24-25

*"Like the Son of God"* Some say it was an angel. Some say it was Christ. Whoever it was, it was a divine being in the middle of the fire.

Friends, you may never, ever really know just how good the presence of God is until you are in the middle of the fire. Who was the fourth person in the fire? I believe it's the presence of Christ, and they knew the fire was hot, and they knew, *"This is our worst nightmare, but somehow, we're not getting burned."*

Sometimes you see people going through what you consider hell on earth and you wonder how they can do it. How do they make it day after day? And they tell you, *"I can't explain it but **God is enough.**"*

**God is enough.** That is a faith that is tested by fire, and that is a faith that can be trusted. That's a "no matter what" faith. That's realizing that sometimes, we will really only experience the goodness of God in the most intimate and powerful way, in the middle of the fire.

When nothing else works and nothing else could, **at that moment, He is enough.** Look at what happened. Verse 27, *“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.”*

Verse 28, King Nebuchadnezzar said, *“Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent His angel and rescued His servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and they were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except for their own God.”* That is a faith that has been tested by fire, and that is a faith that can be trusted.

**When you are tested by fire, and you will be**, we never obey man’s expectations. We always obey the commands of God. We don’t just look at the facts. We look at the truth, and we don’t just believe in God, we believe Him.

And when our faith is tested by fire, and we are on the other side of that testing, we will know His presence like never before and we will never be the same. He is with you. **He will not leave you nor forsake you.**

**Prayer:** “Father, You are the God who knows all of the hurts that we are experiencing, and Lord, I thank You that even when things are not going our way, that You are still God. Lord, help us not to compromise, but to be obedient to You no matter what. Give us the faith, not to just look at the facts, but to believe Your truth, even when the facts say something different. Lord, we pray today that You would give us the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that not only would we believe in You, but we would believe You. And Lord we declare and believe that You are able to deliver us from the fires we face. We believe that You are able, and we believe that You will. Lord, we pray and ask that You would.

We pray that You would be glorified as You deliver us from the fire. Lord, that is our first step of faith, and our second one is, we believe that You can, and that You will. But even if You don’t, O Lord, we still believe. We believe, not because of the outcome of what we would like to see happen, but because You are God, our redeemer, our rock, our righteousness, our shield. You are everything we need. In the middle of the fire, Lord, help us to experience You.”