

# **LifeWay Family Bible Series for March 21: Refuse to compromise when life's trials come\_30804**

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## **Refuse to compromise when life's trials come**

*Daniel 3:1-2, 4-6, 13-18, 21, 24-25, 27-28*

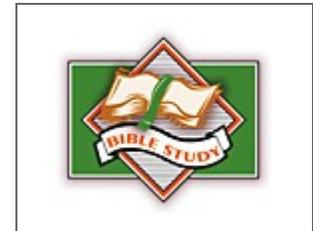
**By Rodney McGlothlin**

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Do you have a favorite kind of story? As a child, I liked westerns. Now I am more interested in science fiction or fantasy. Everybody likes a mystery. Our literature is enriched by the varieties of potential kinds of stories.

The Bible is full of different kinds of stories as well. One of my favorite story types in the Old Testament is the contest story. The Egyptian plagues and the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel are examples of the God of Israel against the gods of Egypt and Baal respectively. They are not stories of which gods had the best followers or prophets. They are stories of which people served the best god.

The focus of this week's lesson is another such contest story. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have refused to worship the king's graven image. Nebuchadnezzar threatens not only them, but their God with the words: "If you do not worship it (the image of gold), you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (Daniel 3:15).



In the end of the story, Nebuchadnezzar says, "... no other god can save in this way" (Daniel 3:29). The issue in these contest stories is not just the faithfulness of God's people. It is the message of God's faithfulness on behalf of his followers.

Faithfulness begins with a choice. This choice must take place before the time of testing comes. In our story, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego have already made a choice. It was the choice to follow God alone. The proclamation of the king demanding idol worship put our three heroes into the crucible of faith. Their choice would be tested. Like Daniel before them, they would not give in to the spiritual bullying of their tyrant king. Their victory was not in the furnace alone. It occurred before the fire was heated seven times hotter. It took place when they determined whom they would follow.

Now is the time to decide who will be Lord of our lives. Then when the testing comes, we will know already which way we need to turn.

You can be sure your faith will be tested. Life is a test tube where elements are mingled and reactions occur. New things are formed. In the case of the believer, that new formation involves the confirmation of choice and the

transformation of character.

God validated the earlier choice of our faithful trio. He honored their commitment to him and brought them through their fiery ordeal without so much as a scorched hair or even a smoke-scented garment.

Someone has said that hard times do not create character, they reveal it. That may well be true. Their character was revealed, and the God who never ceases to “work together for good to those that love him,” goes on “molding them into the image of his Son” (Romans 8:28-29).

Could you thank God for a fiery furnace trial? James said we could, not because of the joy of the trial, but because of the completion of character (James 1:2-4).

When our faith is tested, we can be sure God will be there. Three went in the fire and three came out. Between these bookend experiences was a fourth person. The fourth friend in the flames was variously described by Nebuchadnezzar as a man, a son of the gods and an angel. He covered the bases with his trio of descriptive titles. One thing is clear—he knew the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was with his children in the midst of their ordeal. He always is Immanuel, God With Us.

How would you interpret this story if the three friends had died in the furnace? In church history, the martyrs did not often walk away from the tormentor's flames. They burned. Prophets are flammable.

Each week you continue on a spiritual journey in your class. Some members have been to the fiery furnace and if not severely burned they at least smell smoky. They look and smell more like the leftovers from the fire sale on the Wal-Mart parking lot than they do the new spring merchandise at Neimans. Their life has been messy. Together, remember that God's faithfulness extends beyond the grave to a place where tyrant kings cannot threaten and bully. It may feel like Good Friday now, but Easter is coming.

Maybe that is what our three friends had in mind when they said: “The God we serve is able to save us, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 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 you have set up” (Daniel 3:17, 18).

We have come back to where we began in this lesson. God is faithful. Because he is faithful, we can be too. Encourage faithfulness. Minister well to those who have been burned. Share grace, forgiveness and hope. Happy studying and faithful service!

### **Questions for discussion**

- ◆ What other contest stories from the Old Testament do you recall where God proved his dominion?
- ◆ When you read the story of the fiery furnace, what is the main piece that you will try to recall when trials next come to your life?
- ◆ Does being burned in the trials of life offer evidence of a life lacking in faith?

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