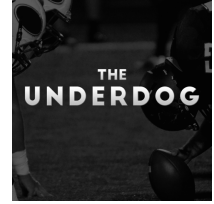


## DISCUSSION GUIDE :: WEEK 2

**THE UNDERDOG**  
**WHEN FACING AN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION**  
**DANIEL 3:1-30**  
11/07/2016



### MAIN POINT

God calls us to courageously stand for our Christian convictions by trusting Him in the midst of opposition.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Who do you think is the most courageous person in the history of our country? Why? Who do you think is the most courageous person in our group? Why?**

**How do you think your life would be different if you were more courageous?**

We have all heard stories of courage in the face of danger or death and some of us have such stories of our own. We all question at times though the depth of our courage when it comes to our lives in Christ. Today we are going to discuss the story of Daniel's friends standing firm for their convictions even when threatened by fire. We may never be faced with the choice to worship a golden statue or be burned alive, but the lesson of courage from Daniel 3 is relevant nonetheless for those of us who long to develop courage that stands when threatened.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ DANIEL 3:1-7.**

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**Who did Nebuchadnezzar call on to worship his statue? Why do you think he chose those people?**

**What was their motivation for worshipping the golden image? What should be our motivation for worship?**

Nebuchadnezzar demanded that people worship what he thought worthy of worship. He built a 90-foot golden statue of, likely, a Babylonian god. He called the leaders in the empire to come and worship the statue, believing that if the leaders worshipped, so would everyone else. They did not worship because they believed in the statue as a god. They worshipped out of fear for their lives. Death by fiery furnace was a strong motivator.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ DANIEL 3:8-18.**

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**Why do you think the Chaldeans told Nebuchadnezzar about the Jews not following?**

**Read Daniel 2:49. Why were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego called before the king? How could this have impacted their courage to stand for their convictions? Have you been in a similar situation in your career? What happened?**

**How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have courage when facing the furnace? Why could they stand with integrity in this way?**

The Chaldeans likely told Nebuchadnezzar about the Jews because they wanted to be superior to the Jews in Nebuchadnezzar's empire. Daniel had just been assigned a position in the king's court and other Jews were becoming influential as well. Some of these Jews were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were put over some affairs of the empire at the request of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar would not like his newly appointed leaders failing to follow orders. However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego courageously stood in their faith because they trusted God and would not worship anyone or anything other than Him. God was greater than their fears, and He is greater than our fears today.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ DANIEL 3:19-30.**

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**What was Nebuchadnezzar's response to the courageous stand of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Do you think it was best for the three Jews that the king did not back off from his threat? Why or why not?**

**How did God protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Why did He protect them?**

**Who was the fourth person in the furnace? How can this truth help you in your own threatening environments?**

Nebuchadnezzar did not care for disobedience and, in his rage, ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. It consumed the men who threw in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God protected the Jews with His power and presence. A fourth person was seen in the furnace with them. This was almost certainly Jesus coming to their aid even in the Old Testament.

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What things of the world are you most tempted to bow to? Why? What step can you take to help you develop courage that stands firm?**

**Why is courage important even when standing in front of someone who has a superior position to us?**

**Is there an area in your life right now where your courage could benefit others? How?**

**Who in your life is struggling to have courage? How can you encourage them?**

## **PRAY**

Close your time in prayer, asking that God would be worshipped at our church and that your group would have the courage stand for Him instead of the things of the world. Pray that your group will be people of integrity and courage in a lost and threatening world.

## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 3:1-30

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3:1. The events of Daniel 3 probably took place shortly after Daniel explained the king's dream (see Dan 2), although some estimate that it could have been 10 or even 20 years later. Babylonian records indicate that there was a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar during the tenth year of his reign, so this may have led to the king's desire for the loyalty test described here. The gold statue was not likely solid gold but was instead overlaid with it. Nebuchadnezzar probably decked the entire thing in gold to negate the message conveyed by the statue of his dream, wherein only the head was gold and signaled that the Babylonian Empire would only be temporary. The location of the plain of Dura has not been conclusively identified. Daniel was not involved in the events here since he remained in the capital city "at the king's court" (2:49) while other officials—including his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were called to Dura to show their loyalty. Had Daniel been there, he too would have refused to bow to the image.

3:2. The exact meaning of these seven positions is unclear other than that they are listed in descending order of rank.

3:4-5. Three of the instruments mentioned—zither, harp, and drum—are the only Greek words in Daniel. The presence of Greek words does not mean that Daniel was written later in the Greek period. Even Assyrian inscriptions that predate the Babylonian period refer to Greek instruments and musicians. Although some conjecture that the gold statue was of Nebuchadnezzar himself, this is unlikely because the Babylonians did not believe their king was divine. More likely, the image was of a Babylonian god, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's patron Nabu or the chief Babylonian god Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar made this demand as some form of loyalty oath to him personally.

3:6. Incineration in a furnace of blazing fire—a punishment that Nebuchadnezzar had also used on two Judean false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab (Jer 29:22)—was a normal Babylonian penalty as seen in the Code of Hammurabi, Sections 25, 110, and 157. Perhaps this furnace was built to smelt the gold for the image Nebuchadnezzar had made.

3:8. "Chaldeans" is both a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people and, as used here, a specific term for priests who served as astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men in the king's government. Their motive in denouncing the three faithful Jewish men was not devotion to the king's demand but rather a hatred for the Jewish people. Hatred of the Jewish people is often on display in the Bible, as with Haman (Est 3:5-6). It reflects a hatred of the God of Israel and is expressed through oppression and attempted genocide of His people (Ps 83:2-5).

3:17-18. The king offered Daniel's friends a second chance to worship the idol, but they persistently refused. The Aramaic imperfect verb *yeseziv* ("He can rescue") in this context indicates possibility and not certainty. They were saying that God might deliver them or He might choose not to do so. Their faith in God did not rest on the belief that He would perform a miracle, but that their sovereign God could be trusted. They asserted that if God chose not to deliver them from this punishment but instead allowed them to become martyrs for Him, they would still refuse to serve the king's gods or worship the gold statue. This is one of the strongest examples of steadfast faith in the Bible.

3:19. The enraged king gave orders to heat the furnace seven times hotter than was customary, an idiom for "as hot as possible."

3:23. The furnace was built on a small hill or mound with openings at the top and side. So the three men fell into the furnace from the top, and the king was able to see four men in the furnace (v. 25) as he looked in through the side opening.

3:25. The king saw in the furnace a fourth figure who looked like a "son of the gods." This may have been an angel or even a pre-incarnate appearance of God the Son.

3:27. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar and all his government officials saw that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men. Not only did the fire fail to burn their hair and clothing, but they did not even have the smell of fire on them. Hebrews 11:34 cites this miracle of faith, referring to those who "quenched the raging of fire."

3:28-29. After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were spared, Nebuchadnezzar saw that the God of Israel was greater than all other gods. Even so, he remained a worshiper of many gods, falling short of full devotion of the one and only true God.