

**OT LESSON #45**  
**“IF I PERISH, I PERISH”**

**DANIEL 1,3,6; ESTHER 3-5, 7-8**

by Ted L. Gibbons

**INTRODUCTION:** In the scriptures and in modern life we occasionally encounter people whose commitment to principle is so remarkable that they cannot be coerced, frightened, or bribed into doing something they believe is wrong. For example:

Gandhi's mother believed that eating meat was wrong, inasmuch as it necessitated the destruction of other life, and Gandhi made a pledge to his mother that he would remain a vegetarian throughout his life. Many years after Gandhi's mother died, Gandhi became very ill and the doctors tried to persuade him that if he would drink a little beef broth it might save his life. But Gandhi said, "Even for life itself we may not do certain things. There is only one course open to me, to die, but never to break my pledge." Just think what would happen to the Church if every one of us had that kind of integrity and self-control (Sterling W. Sill, "The Law of the Fast," Ensign, July 1974, 10).

Old Testament Lesson #45 is about several such people—people who did the right thing without consulting the consequences of their actions. As Elder Sill said, "Just think what would happen to the Church if every one of us had that kind of integrity and self-control."

**1.DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS REFUSE TO EAT KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S FOOD; THEY ARE BLESSED WITH GOOD HEALTH AND WISDOM.**

Chapter 1 of Daniel sets the stage for the two great tests of covenant to follow. I believe we are supposed to see in this simple account of young men resisting royal pressure in the matter of their food a pattern that will sustain them in the greater tests to follow. The four Hebrew youths who determined that they "would not defile" themselves "with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank," had sufficient encouragement to choose otherwise. But these young men did not keep

their covenants because their parents were watching nor because they would be embarrassed if caught doing otherwise. They kept their covenants because they had agreed to and their covenants were not conditional. They were not worried about what a king might do *to* them but about what God had promised to do *for* them.

This is, by comparison to the furnace and the lion's den, a small matter. But people who are not faithful in the little things will never be faithful in the large ones. People who capitulate because of pressure to eat forbidden foods will almost certainly surrender in the presence of the fiery furnace. If we are not obedient in the matters of prayer and scripture study and family home evening, we will never stand faithful when the lion's den is opened.

The record makes it clear how Daniel and his three friends would respond today to invitations to view unworthy media or participate in unworthy activities.

## **2. THE LORD SAVES SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO FROM DEATH IN THE FIERY FURNACE.**

When Daniel interpreted the King's dream in Daniel 2,

Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise [men] of Babylon.

Daniel then spoke on behalf of his friends.

Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel [sat] in the gate of the king (Daniel 2:48,49).

Their new responsibilities insured that they would be expected at the dedication of Neuchadnezzar's new, 90-foot, gold-plated god. The king

sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of

the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

Attending such a gathering would not be a violation of covenant, of course. The three leaders went. But then they heard this announcement:

At what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshipping shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace (Dan. 3:5,6).

This requirement was a violation of covenant. The three were familiar enough with the 10 Commandments to know that falling and worshipping would violate at least two of them. But the penalty for non-compliance was a painful, fiery death. I wonder what thoughts they had as they waited for the first notes of music to sound.

How grateful they must have been for each other. I am confident that their courage increased because they stood together while everyone else bowed. What a blessing it is to have faithful friends when the pressure comes. My faithfulness during my first experience in the Army was made easier because, in a group of thousands, the Lord placed a former missionary companion in the same bunk. He was in the top bed, I was in the bottom. When it became necessary to take a stand, as it sometimes did, neither of us ever had to stand alone.

Can you envision that multitude on the Plain of Dura (Dan. 3:1) falling in waves at the sound of the cornet and sackbut? And can you see those three young men standing calmly? This church needs more people—young and old—like that—people who refuse to worship with the rest of the world in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar heard what they had done.

Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute,

harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? (Daniel 3:14,15).

We know from our perspective that this story has a happy ending, but those three young men facing the King did not know how it would end. All they knew was that they had made covenants to behave in certain ways.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:16-18).

The phrase, “we are not careful to answer thee in this matter” has intrigued me. I know that many times in my life when I have been called to answer for conduct that was unsatisfactory, I have weighed my words most *carefully*, determined not to say anything that might make things worse. But these men were not playing games with words to avoid the furnace. They told the King the truth. *Light the flames, Put us in the furnace. You cannot frighten us into turning away from our covenants. If God wants to save us, he will, but if not, we still will not bow to your god.*

When the three Hebrew children . . . had been brought to a certain position, cast into the fiery furnace because of their undying faith and integrity, they could not after all perhaps have been placed in more pleasing and agreeable circumstances. A holy being, it is said, appeared and walked with them, side by side in the midst of the flames . . . Did they wait to see what God would do for them? No; it was "move on" with them. They knew that in the hands of their Master were held the issues of life and death, and that to die in Him is to live, live eternally, to go on, on to perfection until they should become even like unto Him; and having a living, an abiding faith, and a knowledge of the true and living God, they were ready to live and they were ready to die for

the truth. (Lorenzo Snow: JD, 23:153.)

Notice the effect of this event on the King of Babylon:

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort (Dan. 3:28,29).

## **2. DANIEL PRAYS IN SPITE OF THE KING'S DECREE AND IS THROWN INTO A DEN OF LIONS. THE LORD SENDS AN ANGEL TO PROTECT DANIEL.**

Daniel 6 is an encore to Daniel 3. The beginning verses of Daniel 6 are a powerful witness of the goodness of Daniel. One hundred and twenty princes, with all the resources at their command,

sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him” (Dan. 6:4).

How would your life stand up to that kind of scrutiny? They would find stuff enough on me in about the first three minutes. But not Daniel.

And so they conspired to use the ego of the King against his favorite servant. A law was passed making it a capital offense to ask anything of any man or God but the King Darius for 30 days. How did they know it would work? How did they know that Daniel would not stop praying? Do people who watch you have that kind of certainty about the condition of your character and commitment?

Why do you suppose Daniel continued to pray the way he did?

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime (Daniel 6:10).

Why not close the window? Why not first make sure no one was watching? How about a silent prayer while hiding in a closet? Think of the previous story. Why didn't the three Hebrews kneel at the sound of the music but then pray to Jehovah in Hebrew? No one would have known the difference and the entire episode of the fiery furnace could have been avoided. Or, to put the question in the context of this book, *Why won't Daniel and his friends let their enemies decide how they will keep their covenants and obey the commandments?*

Notice what happened as a result of the faith of Daniel.

Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is] the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that] which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions (Dan. 6:25-27).

### **3. ESTHER RISKS HER LIFE TO SAVE HER PEOPLE.**

Again in Esther we see people determined to do what is right regardless of the jeopardy to their personal comfort and safety. The quote below has been used before in these lessons, but it is appropriate here and worth another look.

One of the principal purposes of this life is to find out if the Lord can trust us. One of our familiar scriptures says, "And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them" (Abr. 3:25). We are destined to be tried, tested, and proven during our sojourn on

earth to see if we are trustworthy. The Prophet Joseph Smith indicated that to attain the highest blessing of this life, we will first be tested and proved thoroughly until the Lord is certain that he can trust us in all things, regardless of the personal hazard or sacrifice involved (Robert E. Wells, "The Cs of Spirituality," Ensign, Nov. 1978, 24).

Let's take a look at three people from Esther:

- A. Queen Vashti:** King Ahasuerus made a seven-day feast for the people of his palace. On the seventh day, when he was somewhat removed from a state of soberness, he sent for his wife, the queen, "to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on" (Esther 1:11). The Queen refused to come and parade for the inebriated king and his drunker courtiers (see Esther 1:1-12). Her decision cost her the crown, but how could we criticize her for her determination in this matter. She seems to have done what she felt was right, regardless of the "personal hazard or sacrifice involved."
  
- B. Mordecai:** I like this man! He is both a patriot and a disciple. When Mordecai learned of an attempt to be made on the King's life, he sent a warning through Esther and protected his monarch. But, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he refused to bow when it was contrary to his covenants of obedience (see Esther 3:1-6). Haman, the king's most trusted servant, was so angry at this lack of respect in Mordecai that he decided to destroy every Jew in the whole kingdom.
  
- C. Esther:** When the king deposed Vashti, he selected a new queen. Esther was the niece of Mordecai and a faithful Israelite. When Haman's plan to destroy the Jews became known, Mordecai appealed to Esther to go to the King and beg him for intervention. This was a problem for Esther. She knew that if she approached the King uninvited, it might cost her her life. But failure to act might cost the lives of thousands of Jews (see Esther 4:11). She sent word to Mordecai:

Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in

unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish (Esther 4:16).

I wish we had time to explore this entire story. I love the book of Esther. I hope you will read it through if you have not already done so.

**CONCLUSION:** We have looked at men and women who could not be turned out of the path defined by their covenants or by their sense of right and wrong. They are people worth emulating. I am delighted to know of people who cannot be terrorized nor paid to abandon their covenants and sense of duty.

During the evening [of October 31, 1838], Gen. Moses Wilson took [Lyman Wight] out by himself, and tried to induce him to betray Joseph Smith, and swear falsely against him; at which time the following conversation took place: General Wilson said, "Col. Wight, we have nothing against you, only that you are associated with Joe Smith. He is our enemy and a damned rascal, and would take any plan he could to kill us. You are a damned fine fellow; and if you will come out and swear against him, we will spare your life, and give you any office you want [in the state of Missouri] . . ." Col. Wight replied, "Gen. Wilson, you are entirely mistaken in your man, both in regard to myself and Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith is not an enemy to mankind; he is not your enemy, and is as good a friend as you have got. Had it not been for him, you would have been in hell long ago, for I should have sent you there, by cutting your throat, and no other man but Joseph Smith could have prevented me, and you may thank him for your life . . ." Wilson said, "Wight, you are a strange man; but if you will not accept my proposal, you will be shot tomorrow morning at 8." Col. Wight replied, "Shoot and be damned" (Wight, Lyman: *LDS Biographical Encyclopedia*, Andrew Jenson, Vol. 1, p.93)

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