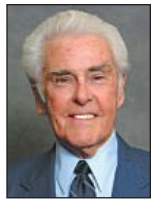


# Stand courageously

In the history of the Middle East, conflict and murder because of religious struggles were often common to the rulers of the



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national states. Our text illustrates such conflict under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 589 BC. The daily newspapers of today are filled with fatal actions by Muslim extremists in our present generation as they kill Christians who become martyrs to their faith in Jesus Christ.

**Nebuchadnezzar's decree demanding worship of his gold idol figure (Daniel 3:1-12).** This king was the most famous ruler of Babylon, who conquered Jerusalem along with other major cities in his military conquests. According to our biblical account, he made "an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide," which he set up in Babylon.

Then he gathered all of the religious and civic leaders to command their worship of the idol when they heard the sound of various musical instruments being played.

At this time the astrologers, who disliked the Jews, reported to the king that the Jewish young men whom he had brought to Babylon from Judah were not worshipping or serving the king's god. Specifically they named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Since religion and politics were tightly bound together in that ancient culture, refusal to worship the gold statue was also an act of treason.

**The angry king demanded their worship of the golden idol (Daniel 3:13-15).** The penalty for refusal would be to immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace. He sarcastically added, "Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

That world was populated with hundreds of pagan gods with about 20 of them actually being worshipped. But the king could not imagine that

any of them could deliver these traitors from the furnace. It is obvious that this was not the first time such punishment was apportioned when the victims were condemned.

**The youths refused to obey the king because of their faith in Yahweh (Daniel 3:16-18).**

The strength of their courage is demonstrated by their willingness to stand against the king's command whether or not God delivered them from the furnace. They did believe that God would save them but their trust in him was not dependent on that happening.

Regardless of what happened, "we will not serve your gods or worship the god of gold that you have set up," they said. In his anger at these boys, the king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed "the men who tossed the three youths into the furnace." Strangely, the king saw "four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods" (3:25).

**Honor God by loving Him more than your own life" (Daniel 3:26-28).**

The king "approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, 'Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!'" When they came out of the fire, the king's leaders saw that the fire had not hurt them or damaged their clothes. Such devotion to Yahweh is also demonstrated in the present Middle East by Christians who are willing to die rather than to deny their faith in Jesus Christ. But sometimes one's convictions lead to loss of personal security or personal resources rather than condemnation to death.

Diana Garland taught the skills of social work within congregations and to hundreds of ministers in order for them to minister to people whom Jesus called "the least" within society. She was on the faculty of the Carver School of Social Work at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in

## Bible Studies for Life

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Scripture: Daniel 3:1-12, 13-18, 26-28

Louisville, Ky., where she became dean until 1995. At that time "the seminary's young president declared, "The culture of social work and the culture of theological education are not congruent."

He refused to grant tenure to social work faculty and vetoed her nomination for a professorship. When Garland contested the president's action, "he fired her for subordination." She was later hired by Baylor University where she was able to reclaim her role in social work ministry" (Word and Way, October 2015, p. 9).

In another situation involving religion and civic actions, "Yossi Cohen was shocked when city inspectors warned him to close his downtown [in Jerusalem] convenience store during the Jewish Sabbath or else be socked with fines." He had been open during the Sabbath for 20 years, but "suddenly the city declares I have to close?"

"This standoff is the latest battle over the religious character of the city between ultra-Orthodox and more secular Jews." The president of an organization called Hiddush, which promotes freedom of religion in Israel, declared, "How does Israel balance between a Jewish state, a democratic state and a state for all its citizens?" (Word and Way, October 2015, p. 27).

Courage to act courageously in conflicts between church and state are prevalent in our country in greater number than we have seen for a long time. Other countries in our world are caught up in similar conflicts that challenge the citizens of those countries to honor religion but are seeking to be able to practice their faith courageously.

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