

# TRUE ALLEGIANCE

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*Daniel 3:28* Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

My friend, Stephen, recently traveled through northern Pennsylvania and stopped at a restaurant called the "Bread of Life" in McAlisterville. This restaurant is unashamedly Christian-themed with a reference to John 6:35 on the front of the menu. Christian music plays softly in the background and the walls are filled with Christian decor. Many of the menu items bear Biblical names, including three sandwiches: the Shadrach, the Meshach and the Abednego!

The testimonies of these three men are extraordinary examples of true allegiance to Almighty God in the face of relentless pressure to compromise.

These were not the names given them by their fathers; they received these names from their captor, King Nebuchadnezzar, when they and the people of Jerusalem were taken as captives to Babylon.

The parents or grandparents of young children may think of them as Rack, Shack, and Benny (the Veggie-Tales characters of a similar story). Their Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Their story is recorded by their friend, Daniel.

Theirs is a suspenseful story of faithfulness through tragedy, persistence through difficulty, and courage in the face of death.

## **Faithful Through Tragedy**

In 605 B.C. the Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city of Jerusalem and overthrew King Jehoiakim, destroying the Temple that Solomon had built. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon with the spoils of war, including most of the Jews who had lived in Jerusalem.

Many of the fathers had been slain in the battle for Jerusalem; now, mothers and children and the elderly were uprooted and herded across 500 miles of wilderness desert to a foreign land, to become the servant class of a strange culture.

Their Temple was no more, the Priesthood was no more. There were no more Jewish festivals or sacrifices. How would they find and worship God in this strange, pagan land? Why had He let them be captured in the first place?

Tragedies have a way of simplifying and clarifying our faith, if we do not toss our faith aside in grief or bitterness. It seems hard to keep the faith when we're hurting and our props have been taken away. However, if we pursue it, faith will be reduced to its simplest and truest forms — treasuring the truths of Scripture and the privilege of worshipful prayer with a few friends who share our joy.

Nebuchadnezzar gathered the strongest, the healthiest, and best-looking young Jewish men to tutor and train for three years, from whom he would select the finest to become his advisors in the royal court. For three years they would learn all they could of Babylonian language, lore, and literature. They were to be treated like royalty themselves and fed the best foods from the king's table. To some it might have sounded like winning the jackpot, instead of a hardship, except that, for these Jewish men, it was the curse of worldliness.

Their faith was not worn like a garment that could be temporarily removed when religion was inconvenient. Their faith was so much a part of who they were that they could not conceive of living another way, even for a day, without doing injury to their personal identity.

Therefore, at potentially great cost to themselves, they persisted in practicing their faith as much as they were permitted to do so. Even without the encouragement of gathering with others of like faith as before, they maintained their daily prayers and the diet God had prescribed for them.

God honored their evident faith with wellness of body and brightness of mind and they grew more confident of His reliability in all sorts of circumstances. Some of those circumstances were anything but comfortable, for they were a minority and they had opponents who resented their presence.

### **Persistent Through Difficulty**

About that time, Nebuchadnezzar was pretty pleased with himself and he had a huge golden statue erected in his own honor. It was 90 feet tall, which is another 15 feet taller than the palm trees outside this building, or the equivalent of a 9-story building.

At the dedication of his statue, the National Orchestra was assembled to play the National Anthem. A special protocol was announced: At the sound of the anthem, people of every race, nationality, and language were to bow in homage to the king. Somebody suspected their might be resistance, for the protocol carried a heavy penalty for disobedience: death by burning.

Patriotism was strong that day, but there were some in that great crowd whose allegiance was to a higher power. The Jews had been raised to bow to no one as king but God alone.

Although Nebuchadnezzar had been a relatively beneficent ruler, valuing and protecting his Jewish captives, this statue was his “line in the sand” to affirm his sovereign power. Not even a track record of faithfulness and wise counsel would exempt the Hebrew men from the consequences of failing to bow down to Nebuchadnezzar.

Their envious adversaries made sure to tell the king that “some Jews — Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” refused to worship the statue.

Nebuchadnezzar was incredulous. He became enraged and confronted them directly: “Is it true that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? I will give you one more chance. If you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. What god will be able to rescue you from my power then?”

Oops. Nebuchadnezzar did not understand their faith. Their faith was not a ticket to good times, nor was their faith overthrown by hard times. Their faith was their genuine connection to the Living God. Nebuchadnezzar did not realize that he had just thrown down the gauntlet at the feet of Almighty God. He was about to get an answer to his blasphemous and arrogant question.

### **Courageous to the Death**

The three men replied:

*Daniel 3:16* “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty.

<sup>18</sup> But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”

Give attention to their reply. Take careful note of their attitude in the face of threatening: they were calm, respectful, clear, and firm. They were not defensive; they were resigned to trust God. They actually trusted Him! They didn't know how it would turn out for them or what they might have to endure, but they trusted God to take care of them, whichever way *He* chose.

“O king, you do what you think you must. Our God is able to rescue us from you, your Majesty. But even if He chooses not to, please be clear about one thing, your Majesty, our choice has already been made. We will not bow to another.”

At this, the king’s face became “distorted with rage.” Reason was tossed aside; brute fury had taken over. The veins in his neck stood out and his eyes bulged with intensity. The devil had taken advantage of his pride and made him a destroyer.

He commanded that the furnace be heated “seven times hotter than usual.” The tied them up with their clothes on for added fuel. The flames were so hot that the soldiers who threw the three men into the fire were themselves slain by the heat!

Settling back on his seat to relish their agonizing deaths, the king was startled by something he saw. In the midst of the roaring blaze, he saw the men walking about, no longer bound by cords, as though strolling through a park! And a fourth man was with them, who appeared like some divine being!

Approaching the still boisterous flames as close as he dared, the king shouted their names.

*Daniel 3:26 “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire.<sup>27</sup> Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn’t even smell of smoke!*

Miracles upon miracles. This was unprecedented. This was inexplicable! But the message was clear. Nebuchadnezzar’s change of life was beginning.

*Daniel 3:28 “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king’s command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.<sup>29</sup> There is no other god who can rescue like this!”*

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego demonstrated four qualities of genuine faith that followers of Christ today also require:

- **Uncompromising Convictions** (Daniel 1)  
They refused to exchange their integrity for worldly pleasures or convenience or to please others.
- **Unwavering Commitment** (Daniel 3:12)  
God, and God alone, was the center of their lives.
- **Unswerving Courage** (Daniel 3:16, 17)  
They were not afraid to speak directly to the king in God’s name.
- **Unshakable Confidence** (Daniel 3:18)  
They looked, with hope, beyond their immediate circumstances.

Elton Trueblood has written, "Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation."

He was a brilliant young man with a place in high society yet he gave up his reputation to mobilize fellow-students at Yale to prayer. He was born into great wealth yet he gave up his fortune and became a missionary. He had everything to live for and then, still in his twenties, he gave up his life. This is the amazing story of Billy Borden, a young man who lived and died for prayer, mission and justice...

As heir to the Borden Dairy estate, William Borden was already a millionaire when he graduated High School in 1904. In fact, his graduation present from his parents was a trip around the world. As the 16-year-old Bor-

den traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Finally, Bill Borden wrote home to say, *"I'm going to give my life to prepare for the mission field."* One friend expressed surprise that he was *"throwing himself away as a missionary."* In response, Bill wrote two words in the back of his Bible: **"No reserves."** He would not hold back for himself anything the Lord asked of him. He knew that you cannot outgive God.

Even though young Borden was wealthy, he arrived on the campus of Yale University in 1905 trying to look like just one more freshman. Very quickly, however, Borden's classmates noticed something unusual about him and it wasn't his money. One of them wrote: "He came to college far ahead, spiritually, of any of us. He had already given his heart in full surrender to Christ and had really done it. We who were his classmates learned to lean on him and find in him a strength that was solid as a rock, just because of this settled purpose and consecration."

During his first semester at Yale, Borden started something that would transform campus life. One of his friends described how it happened: "It was well on in the first term when Bill and I began to pray together in the morning before breakfast. I cannot say positively whose suggestion it was, but I feel sure it must have originated with Bill. We had been meeting only a short time when a third student joined us and soon after a fourth. The time was spent in prayer after a brief reading of Scripture. Bill's handling of Scripture was helpful. . . . He would read to us from the Bible, show us something that God had promised and then proceed to claim the promise with assurance."

Borden's small morning prayer group gave birth to a movement that spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 freshmen were meeting for weekly Bible study and prayer. By the time Bill Borden was a senior, one thousand of Yale's 1,300 students were meeting in such groups.

Borden's outreach ministry was not confined to the Yale campus. He cared about widows and orphans and cripples. He rescued drunks from the streets of New Haven. To rehabilitate them, he founded the Yale Hope Mission. One of his friends wrote that he "might often be found in the lower parts of the city at night, on the street, in a cheap lodging house or some restaurant to which he had taken a poor hungry fellow to feed him, seeking to lead men to Christ."

"Although he was a millionaire, Bill seemed to realize always that he must be about his Father's business, and not wasting time in the pursuit of amusement." Although Borden refused to join a fraternity, "he did more with his classmates in his senior year than ever before." He presided over the huge student missionary conference held at Yale and served as president of the honor society Phi Beta Kappa. Upon graduation from Yale, Borden turned down some high paying job offers. In his Bible, he wrote two more words: **"No retreats."** He would not create or maintain any "back doors" to make an easy escape or to avoid his responsibilities.

William Borden went on to graduate work at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey. When he finished his studies at Princeton, he sailed for China. Because he was hoping to work with Muslims, he stopped first in Egypt to study Arabic. While there, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

When news of William Whiting Borden's death was cabled back to the U.S., the story was carried by nearly every American newspaper. "A wave of sorrow went round the world . . . Borden not only gave (away) his wealth, but himself, in a way so joyous and natural that it (seemed) a privilege rather than a sacrifice," wrote Mary Taylor in her introduction to his biography.

Was Borden's untimely death a waste? Not in God's plan. Just the day before his death, Borden had written two more words in his Bible. Underneath the words "No reserves" and "No retreats," he wrote: **"No regrets."** In the Kingdom of God, nothing is wasted — not even our mistakes (God works all things together for good).

*No reserves; no retreats; no regrets.* That's the way to follow Jesus Christ. That's the way to have a full life, no matter how long or short it may be. That's the way to show true allegiance to God.

How much of yourself have you given to Christ? How much are you willing to give?

Are you holding something in reserve today? Learn, as Billy Borden did, to say “No” to self and “Yes” to Jesus every time.