

FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH



AMAZING FACTS

Lesson 2

Sin: Choosing Our Allegiance



As a seemingly unconquerable king, Nebuchadnezzar believed that he was worthy of the highest honors. After all, nations had trembled before his armies and world powers had fallen before his mighty rule. Nebuchadnezzar felt that his supreme authority deserved universal allegiance. So, at the urging of his counselors, he erected a colossal golden image and required representatives from all the empires on earth to come and acknowledge his absolute right to be worshipped as a god. The king's command was law, and any who refused to bow before the golden idol would be thrown into a fiery furnace and incinerated.



Multitudes were gathered, ceremonial music was played, and then the order to bow in veneration was proclaimed. All across the plain of Dura, people prostrated themselves in worship before the representation of King Nebuchadnezzar—all except three Hebrew men. Immediately the lawbreakers were brought before the furious king. Giving Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego a second chance, he repeated the command and then warned, “If you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:15). Then, as a final clincher, he challenged, “Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”

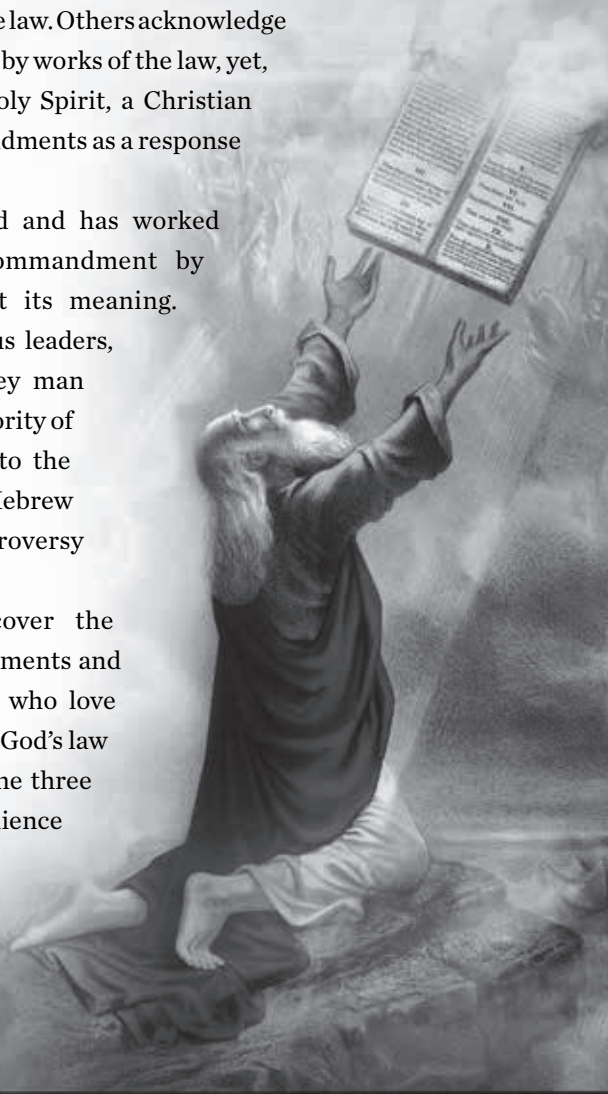
Would the three Hebrews comply with the king's command or obey the law of God?

God's holy law, the Ten Commandments, were presented most clearly to the Israelites by the Lord at Mount Sinai. They express God's will for all humanity and are eternal. God's law forms the basis of His covenant with humanity and is also the standard used in the final judgment. Each precept helps to portray the character of our loving God.

Many Christians are divided on whether or not God requires us to keep His commandments. Some say it is impossible and believe God's grace has set aside the law. Others acknowledge that we are saved by grace and not by works of the law, yet, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a Christian will seek to obey the Ten Commandments as a response to God's pardoning love.

Satan hates the law of God and has worked diligently to destroy every commandment by seeking to set aside or distort its meaning. Working through civil or religious leaders, he has compelled people to obey man instead of God, to bow to the authority of the state instead of in worship to the Lord. In the story of the three Hebrew men, we clearly see this controversy played out.

In this lesson, we'll discover the importance of the Ten Commandments and the blessings promised to those who love and obey Him. What truths about God's law may we learn from the story of the three Hebrews who stood firm in obedience to the Lord? What does the Bible teach about the role of the law in the Christian's life?



HOLY



God's law reflects His character.

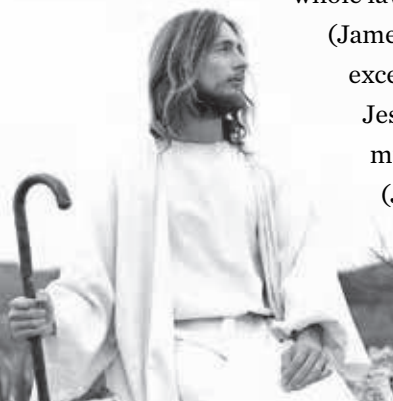
The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good (Romans 7:12).

Many attributes of God's law reflect the characteristics used in the Bible to describe Him. In Romans 7:12, the apostle Paul said the law is holy. The Bible also speaks of "God who is holy" (Isaiah 5:16). David wrote, "The law of the LORD is perfect" (Psalm 19:7). Jesus taught that "your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). The very qualities of God are found within His law.

God expects us to keep His law.

If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments (Matthew 19:17).

God gave His law to humanity to be a blessing and to guide us into a deeper connection with Him. It provides a clear outline of the Lord's will for us—and it requires obedience. The Bible says, "Whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Of course, such obedience is not possible except by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).



FREEDOM



Keeping God's law does not restrict our happiness but leads to true freedom.

Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34).

We lose our freedom when we break God's commandments, but when we obey His law we find true liberty. David wrote, "I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts" (Psalm 119:45). The Bible speaks of the commandments as "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). God's law guides us into paths of life and peace. Those who break the commands of the Lord are led to despair, unhappiness, and ultimately, eternal death.

The law of God brings conversion to our hearts.

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul (Psalm 19:7).

When we compare our lives with the Ten Commandments, the Holy Spirit brings conviction to our hearts regarding the sin in us. We are reminded that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and that without a Savior we are doomed. The law itself cannot save us. "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24).

God's law is absolute, eternal, and unchangeable.

*Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge,
My commandments, My statutes, and My laws (Genesis 26:5).*

God's law existed before Mount Sinai. Abraham obeyed the commandments hundreds of years before the Ten Commandments were given at the mountain.

Joseph understood God's law and, when he refused to commit adultery, said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Genesis 39:9). The New Testament explains that "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). If evil angels "sinned" in heaven, then God's law has been around for a long time. (See 2 Peter 2:4.) Just as "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), so the law of God is eternal and unchangeable.

The law and the gospel are in perfect harmony.

By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

No efforts at keeping God's law can save us. "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The law convicts us of sin so that we turn to Christ, yet when we confess our sins and turn away from sin, the Lord writes His law on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10).

Faith does not do away with the law.

Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law (Romans 3:31).

Being justified by faith does not remove God's law from our lives. When we accept Christ's sacrifice for our sins and invite Him into our hearts, we are empowered by the Spirit to keep the principles of the law. Jesus' death on the cross restores our relationship with God that His law may be written on our hearts. We can never keep the law in our own human strength.

Jesus upheld God's law.

Assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:18).

Christ warned that lawbreakers will not go to heaven. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). He explained, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's

commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). True followers of Jesus will want to obey His law. “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

God's people will obey His law, even in the face of death.

Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up (Daniel 3:17, 18).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were willing to die rather than disobey God's law. In this case, the Lord physically protected His faithful servants from death. The king was astonished and “saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them” (Daniel 3:27). Christ reminded us that we should not fear those who kill our bodies—for when we are “faithful until death,” the Lord promises, “I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

God is glorified when people obey His law.

Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, who sent His Angel and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, and they have frustrated the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own God!” (Daniel 3:28).

When the three Hebrews were miraculously saved in the fiery furnace, a large group observed what happened, including the king. Nebuchadnezzar was so impressed by the deliverance that he made a decree that no one should speak “anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego” (Daniel 3:29). He then promoted the men in the province of Babylon.

Will you choose, through God's strength, to determine to obey His law and be a witness for Him in your life?

Reformer Highlight



John Calvin (1509–1564) was an influential French theologian, pastor, and reformer during the Protestant Reformation. Driven from his own country by his commitment to Protestantism, he resided in Geneva and established a church that held to the supremacy of God’s law and the Bible. Calvin held high the principles of simple living and purity. He originally trained to be a lawyer but studied the Scriptures and was convicted by

the teachings of Protestantism. He promoted the Reformation throughout Europe until his death.

“I will have none of your new doctrines ... think you that I have lived in error all my days?” —*John Calvin [in response to first hearing Protestant teachings]*