

The Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3

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The Image of Gold, Daniel 3:1-7

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its width six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. ² And King Nebuchadnezzar sent word to gather together the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ³ So the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered together for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. ⁴ Then a herald cried aloud: "To you it is commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, ⁵ that at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, you shall fall down and worship the gold image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up; ⁶ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace."

⁷ So at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, harp, and lyre, in symphony with all kinds of music, all the people, nations, and languages fell down and worshiped the gold image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

What did King Nebuchadnezzar do?

He had built a 90 foot high golden idol (6 cubits wide by 60 cubits high)

- The colossal size made it likely that the frame was wood overlaid with gold

Following Daniel's interpretation of his dream he had declared Daniel's God as God of gods and Lord of kings in Daniel 2:47... what happened?

Professed faith is not necessarily true conversion faith... he obviously defaulted back to his pagan ways.

- Head knowledge is not always heart knowledge.
- The Septuagint tells us this event took place some 18 years after Daniel's dream interpretation.

What might have motivated the King to set up this idol?

- His vaunted pride was self-deification and rebellion against the God of heaven
- He might have been seeking a unifying principle to weld together the diverse peoples of his kingdom into one great totalitarian government
- It was his attempt to institute a one world religion as was began at the Tower of Babel
- King Nebuchadnezzar's victory over the kingdom of Judah proved to him that his Babylonian god Marduk was superior to the God of the Jews

What was demanded of the authorities and people of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom at the dedication of the idol?

- A proclamation was made commanding all people to fall down prostrating themselves before the image upon hearing the musical signal
- This was more than a dedication – people were required to show allegiance to the king by worshiping his god
- Whatever gods they had previously worshiped, now they must worship this image

What was the penalty for not complying?

To be killed by being cast into a fiery furnace.

- The terror of that furnace caused most to disregard any insult it might cause to their own gods

Daniel's Friends Disobey the King, Daniel 3:8-18

⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews. ⁹ They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image; ¹¹ and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up."

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. So they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?"

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If that is the case, 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. ¹⁸ 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."

Who were these "certain Chaldeans" who snitched on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego?

Probably the pagan wise men who still hold a grudge that the Hebrews were able to win favor with the king.

How do you think Nebuchadnezzar handled the situation?

- He deserves some credit... he was willing to question the three Jews to verify and validate the report that they did not prostrate themselves on the ground. He did not just take the word of those making the report.
- He was willing to have the musicians play again giving them a second chance to comply thus forgiving their first offense
- However, the remark, "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" was demeaning and meant to be a derogatory remark toward the God of the Jews

How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego respond to the king's second chance?

They persisted in not serving any god but the Creator-God of Scripture.

- They did not plead their case of how wrong Nebuchadnezzar's requirement was
- They did not call the King a tyrant or an idolater
- They did not condemn or insult those who did bow down to the image
- They did not court martyrdom but said if they were called to die in the fiery furnace they would do so bravely because their cause was just

What reason did the three Hebrews have to hope that God would deliver them from the furnace?

- It would glorify God if He did deliver them in front of this vast audience – they would carry the miracle back home and spread the event far and wide!
- It would be a rebuke to the prideful and blasphemous Nebuchadnezzar who either supposed that the God they worshiped would not be able to deliver them or not be disposed to do so
- Perhaps they had in mind the prophetic promise of more than a century before...
Isaiah 43:2 – "When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

What gave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego such confidence in God?

- They had seen Him work miracles in the past... Daniel's dream interpretation.
- They did not question His ability to save them
- They believed He would do what He thought was best in this case
- They committed the whole situation into His hands (v18) ...If they live or die, it is God's call!

What is the principle here that may be applied to us today and, in particular, Israel during the Tribulation?

God honors those who honor Him with their courage... The refusal of the three Hebrew children to bow down and worship the image and their deliverance is seen as a type of the way God will preserve the believing children of Israel during the seven-year Tribulation, when they refuse to worship the image of the Antichrist.

Saved in Fiery Trial, Daniel 3:19-25

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. ²⁰ And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. ²¹ Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²² Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. ²³ And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. ²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." ²⁵ "Look!" he answered, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."

How did Nebuchadnezzar react to the three Hebrews expressing their faith in God?

- He became outraged and had a temper tantrum!
- He exchanged his esteemed position as King of Babylon to that of being a mad man – the real man came to the surface
- He ordered the furnace to be heated to seven times normal

Why did it require men of valor to cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace?

The king's command was urgent and the furnace was so hot that any who came close to the furnace would be in peril; indeed, those who threw them in themselves died from the heat.

What did Nebuchadnezzar see in the furnace?

He saw three men walking about unbound and "one who looked like a son of the gods"

- The fire only consumed the ropes and cords that bound them
- The flames of the fire did not harm them

Who is that one who "looks like a son of the gods"?

- From Nebuchadnezzar's pagan point of view – "son of the gods"
- From a Scriptural point of view – the "pre-incarnate Son of God"
- The three Hebrews were enjoying the company of the one who was preserving them, Jesus the Christ!

Nebuchadnezzar Praises God, Daniel 3:26-30

²⁶ Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here." Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego came from the midst of the fire. ²⁷ And the satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they 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.

²⁸ 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! ²⁹ Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap; because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego in the province of Babylon.

How did Nebuchanezzar react to seeing the three Hebrews unharmed in the furnace?

He commanded the three to come out of the furnace. They came out and upon inspection found there was no harm done to them!

How did Nebuchadnezzar refer to the three Hebrews when he called them out of the furnace?

- Nebuchadnezzar now acknowledges what the three really were calling them the “*servants of the Most High God*”
- The King of Babylon, the most pagan nation in the world, acknowledged that the God of the Hebrews is supreme

Was this a sincere confession of Nebuchadnezzar?

Doubtful, this confession of Nebuchadnezzar is superficial at best – his pride stood in the way of a total commitment and acknowledgment of God as LORD!

What decree did Nebuchadnezzar make as a result?

Anyone who “*speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made an ash heap*”

- This decree is in accordance with the usual style of an Oriental Monarch of that time... Their bodies to be cut with the sword by hewing in pieces and the utmost possible dishonor and contempt placed on their homes to be made a dung hill
- There is no evidence that this decree was enforced!

How did God use this miracle to preserve the Hebrew people in captivity in Babylon?

While Nebuchadnezzar's initial order required that public officials, who were present, must worship the

golden image, it is certain that the decree would have subsequently been expanded to include all the subjects of his Babylonian Empire

- Thus, all the Jews living in captivity throughout the Babylonian Empire would have been ordered to worship this idol
- If God had not intervened, all the Jews who refused to worship a false god would have been executed -- probably by fire
- By choosing obedience to God, the three young Hebrews prevented the vast majority of the Jews in Babylon from becoming victims to genocide!

What principles come to mind that we can apply to our own lives in the here and now?

- God is sovereign whether the results are tragic or triumphant
- God never promised us the Christian life would be without tribulation; the abundant life is knowing we are eternally saved – come what may!
- God is sovereign whether He says “yes” or “no”
- Suffering is sometimes necessary whether it is “fair” or “not fair” ...we would say that it was “unfair” what happened to these three men
- Deliverance is impressive whether seen by “godly” or by “ungodly” men
- God uses Christians as sermons to reflect His Glory.

What principles are seen by seeing the fiery furnace as a type of the Tribulation?

There will be great affliction for the Jews and new Christian believers during the Tribulation Period

- The three Hebrew men are a type of Israel, who will be preserved through the Tribulation Period
- Nebuchadnezzar is a type of the Antichrist. He is trying to force believers to bow down to his own image and worship him (indirectly worshiping Satan).
- Daniel is a type of the Church. He is not present during all this activity