

MESSAGE TITLE: Faith in the Fire

SCRIPTURE: Daniel 3

KEY TRUTH

Trials and pain are part of life on earth. Whether it is sickness or persecution or disappointment, every person will have to walk through the fire. So, Daniel 3 is a great reminder that God uses the plans of the enemy to purify the faith of His people.

GETTING STARTED

Daniel's home country of Judah was captured by Babylon and forced into exile. Daniel lived most of his life cut off from his homeland, his culture, and the free practice of his faith. Despite the hostile environment in which he lived, Daniel refused to give into the temptation to compromise his faith and integrity to advance as an employee of the king of Babylon. In doing so, Daniel and his friends paint a faithful picture of what it means to confidently stand for convictions during opposition. Their story truly reveals what it takes to have faith in the fire of life's trials.

OBSERVATION

Read Daniel 3:1-7.

Who did Nebuchadnezzar call on to worship his statue? Why do you think he chose those people?

What was their motivation for worshipping the golden image?

Read verse 3. Who gathered before the statue and for what purpose?

What instruments, when played, cued the people to bow down to worship the image Nebuchadnezzar erected?

Nebuchadnezzar demanded that people worship what he thought worthy of worship. He built a 90-foot golden statue of, likely, a Babylonian god. He called the leaders in the empire to come and worship the statue, believing that if the leaders worshipped, so would everyone else. They did not worship because they believed in the statue as a god. They worshipped out of fear for their lives. Death by fiery furnace was a strong motivator.

Read Daniel 3:8-18.

Why do you think the Chaldeans told Nebuchadnezzar about the Jews not following?

Read Daniel 2:49. Why were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego called before the king? How could this have impacted their courage to stand for their convictions?

How would you characterize the response of the 3 Hebrew friends in verses 16-18? What is the relationship between belief and conviction?

Does conviction automatically result in confidence in the world and commitment to the Lord? Explain.

How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego have courage when facing the furnace? What empowered them to stand with integrity?

The Chaldeans likely told Nebuchadnezzar about the Jews because they wanted to be superior to the Jews in Nebuchadnezzar's empire. Daniel had just been assigned a position in the king's court, and other Jews were becoming influential as well. Some of these Jews were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were put over some affairs of the empire at the request of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar would not like his newly appointed leaders failing to follow orders. However, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego courageously stood in their faith because they trusted God and would not worship anyone or anything other than Him. God was greater than their fears, and He is greater than our fears today.

Read Daniel 3:19-30.

What was Nebuchadnezzar's response to the confident commitment of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Do you think it was best for the three Jews that the king did not back off from his threat? Why or why not?

What filled the king according to verse 19, and how did he give vent to his emotions?

What did the king see when he peered into the furnace? How did the fourth figure appear to him?

What did King Nebuchadnezzar and his officials observe about Daniel, Meshach and Abednego when they emerged from the fiery furnace?

What conclusion did King Nebuchadnezzar reach about Daniel's God? What edict did he issue regarding praising the one true God?

How did God protect Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? Why did He protect them?

Nebuchadnezzar did not care for disobedience and, in his rage, ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual. It consumed the men who threw in Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. God protected the Jews with His power and presence. A fourth person was seen in the furnace with them—this was almost certainly Jesus coming to their aid, even in the Old Testament.

APPLICATION

Consider how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to our lives.

To what things of the world are you most tempted to bow? Why? What steps can you take to develop confident conviction that stands firm amid trials and testing?

What are some culturally accepted or politically driven issues where Christians today might feel pressured to go along with the crowd? What could be their motivation for doing so? How can we make decisions ahead of time not to go along with the crowd?

Have you been in a similar situation as Daniel in your career, in which you were pressured to go along with the crowd even when you knew it was wrong to do so? What happened? What did you learn from this fiery trial?

What does the statement, “But even if He does not rescue us” in verse 18 tell you about standing up for your Christian convictions?

What truth can you apply to your own life from verse 25? How does this verse help you in your own threatening environments?

What about when God doesn’t intervene in the sense of a physical, earthly rescue? Knowing He doesn’t always do that, why should you stand confidently in your convictions with commitment to the Lord?

How can this group pray for you in your confidence, convictions, and commitment to the Lord?

PRAYER

Thank God for the example of believers who have gone before us, facing opposition with confidence, conviction, and commitment. Read Hebrews 11:32-40 for examples of biblical characters who by faith achieved victory over impossible odds and suffered unimaginable loss. Pray specifically for group members who face situations where they are tempted to compromise their convictions. Ask God according to 2 Timothy 1:7 to strive with the Holy Spirit of power, love and sound judgment.

COMMENTARY NOTES

3:1. The events of Daniel 3 probably took place shortly after Daniel explained the king’s dream (see Dan 2), although some estimate that it could have been 10 or even 20 years later. Babylonian records indicate that there was a revolt against Nebuchadnezzar during the tenth year of his reign, so this may have led to the king’s desire for the loyalty test described here. The gold statue was not likely solid gold but was instead overlaid with it. Nebuchadnezzar probably decked the entire thing in gold to negate the message conveyed by the statue of his dream, wherein only the head was gold and signaled that the Babylonian Empire would only be temporary. The location of the plain of Dura has not been conclusively identified. Daniel was not involved in the events here since he remained in the capital city “at the king’s court” (2:49) while other officials—including his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—were called to Dura to show their loyalty. Had Daniel been there, he too would have refused to bow to the image.

3:2. The exact meaning of these seven positions is unclear other than that they are listed in descending order of rank.

3:4-5. Three of the instruments mentioned—zither, harp, and drum—are the only Greek words in Daniel. The presence of Greek words does not mean that Daniel was written later in the Greek period. Even Assyrian inscriptions that predate the Babylonian period refer to Greek instruments and musicians. Although some conjecture that the gold statue was of Nebuchadnezzar himself, this is unlikely because the Babylonians did not believe their king was divine. More likely, the image was of a Babylonian god, perhaps Nebuchadnezzar's patron Nabu or the chief Babylonian god Marduk. Nebuchadnezzar made this demand as some form of loyalty oath to him personally.

3:6. Incineration in a furnace of blazing fire—a punishment that Nebuchadnezzar had also used on two Judean false prophets, Zedekiah and Ahab (Jer 29:22)—was a normal Babylonian penalty as seen in the Code of Hammurabi, Sections 25, 110, and 157. Perhaps this furnace was built to smelt the gold for the image Nebuchadnezzar had made.

3:8. “Chaldeans” is both a general ethnic term for the Babylonian people and, as used here, a specific term for priests who served as astrologers, soothsayers, and wise men in the king's government. Their motive in denouncing the three faithful Jewish men was not devotion to the king's demand but rather a hatred for the Jewish people. Hatred of the Jewish people is often on display in the Bible, as with Haman (Est 3:5-6). It reflects a hatred of the God of Israel and is expressed through oppression and attempted genocide of His people (Ps 83:2-5).

3:17-18. The king offered Daniel's friends a second chance to worship the idol, but they persistently refused. The Aramaic imperfect verb *yeseziv* (“He can rescue”) in this context indicates possibility and not certainty. They were saying that God might deliver them or He might choose not to do so. Their faith in God did not rest on the belief that He would perform a miracle, but that their sovereign God could be trusted. They asserted that if God chose not to deliver them from this punishment but instead allowed them to become martyrs for Him, they would still refuse to serve the king's gods or worship the gold statue. This is one of the strongest examples of steadfast faith in the Bible.

3:19. The enraged king gave orders to heat the furnace seven times hotter than was customary, an idiom for “as hot as possible.”

3:23. The furnace was built on a small hill or mound with openings at the top and side. So, the three men fell into the furnace from the top, and the king could see four men in the furnace (v. 25) as he looked in through the side opening.

3:25. The king saw in the furnace a fourth figure who looked like a “son of the gods.” This may have been an angel or even a pre-incarnate appearance of God the Son.

3:27. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar and all his government officials saw that the fire had no effect on the

bodies of these men. Not only did the fire fail to burn their hair and clothing, but they did not even have the smell of fire on them. Hebrews 11:34 cites this miracle of faith, referring to those who “quenched the raging of fire.”

3:28-29. After Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were spared, Nebuchadnezzar saw that the God of Israel was greater than all other gods. Even so, he remained a worshiper of many gods, falling short of full devotion of the one and only true God.

SOURCES CONSULTED

ESV Study Bible

HCSB Study Bible

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