

Faith in the Fiery Furnace

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 43:1-7

Background Scripture: Daniel 3:1-30

Today's Scripture: Daniel 3:19-28

I. Royal Anger

Daniel 3:19-23

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated.

20 And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace.

21 Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

19. The *fury* of *Nebuchadnezzar* becomes a central point in the early chapters of the book of Daniel. He became angry when his wise men could not interpret his

dreams (see Daniel 2:10-13). The refusal of the three Jewish men to bow before the golden image led the king to “rage and fury” (3:13). The king’s anger continued. Whatever goodwill *Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* had experienced from the king was lost. The king had once demonstrated some sense of worship of the God of Israel (see 2:46-47). However, when the worship of the true God prevented Nebuchadnezzar from receiving worship, the king resorted to anger and wrath.

The king’s command that *the furnace* be heated *seven times more* than usual is a hyperbolic figure of speech. A mention of the number *seven* in Scripture typically indicates fullness, totality, or completion. There was likely no way to accurately measure the furnace’s temperature to know whether it was seven times hotter. The command intended to communicate that the furnace should be heated to the maximum temperature it could reach.

20. Nothing in the narrative indicates why Nebuchadnezzar chose *the most mighty men* of his army. These soldiers would have been the best of the best in the king’s military. They were likely an elite fighting force valued for their physical strength and power. Perhaps the king anticipated that the Jewish men would put up a fight when they realized their destination.

21. The exact *garments* worn by the three Jewish *men* are unknown because the underlying Aramaic words are relatively rare. Their clothes were likely more in the style of Persia rather than that of Israel. This detail reveals that the king had the men *bound* as they wore flammable clothing. Such wearable “fuel” would have ignited when the king’s toughest men *cast* the three Jewish men *into* the superheated *furnace*.

22. Angry outbursts followed by acts of haste and harshness were typical for Nebuchadnezzar. After the king heard that his wise men could not interpret his dreams, he angrily ordered their execution (see Daniel 2:10-13). When hearing of the king’s directive regarding his wise men, Daniel questioned why such a “hasty” decree had been issued (2:14-15).

In this verse, Nebuchadnezzar’s *urgent* command toward the three Jewish men again revealed his brutality. The king’s *commandment* affected the three Jewish men and led to the death of the most mighty *men*.

23. The narrative repeats two details already known: the names of *these three men* and the intensity of the *fiery furnace*. That these three men *fell down bound into* the furnace was not the result of an unfortunate accident. They had refused to follow the directive to “fall down” and worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image of gold. Now, the king forced the three men to “fall down” to a *burning* death—or so he thought.

II. Divine Presence Daniel 3:24-28

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king.

25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire.

27 And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

24. Throughout the book of Daniel, the leaders in Babylon reacted with fear and amazement when God demonstrated miraculous power. Nebuchadnezzar’s response before us continued that trend. *Nebuchadnezzar* intended to execute the three Jewish men. However, something unique and miraculous caused *the king* to be *astonied*. As in the other examples, this occurrence was something only God could bring about.

25. The identity of the *fourth* figure *in the midst of the fire* has long been a subject of discussion among students. The capitalization of the title *Son of God* indicates one possibility: this fourth person was

the preincarnate Christ. However, this option provides interpretive difficulty and more questions than answers. For example, it leads us to question what Nebuchadnezzar did to merit this unique vision of the preincarnate Christ. Although we cannot rule out this possibility, this option is challenging to hold.

It is notable that the title comes from the lips of the Babylonian king and not from one of the Jews. Nebuchadnezzar worshipped many pagan gods. He likely did not recognize that this figure was the one true God. From his perspective, this figure was a member of the pantheon of pagan gods that he worshipped.

The phrase “son(s) of God” can refer to angels or presumed deities. This option explains the likely identification of this mysterious figure. This angelic presence protected the three men amid their fiery trial. The Babylonian king received a sign. The God who sent this angelic presence protected His people from being *hurt*.

26. Upon seeing the fourth figure, the king experienced a change of heart. His rage diminished, and he addressed the men by their (Babylonian) names. Although they received these names from the king, their ultimate allegiances lay beyond Nebuchadnezzar. Instead, they were *servants* of God. In this proclamation, Nebuchadnezzar admitted the folly of his previous statement regarding the power of God.

The title *most high* refers to the God of Israel. Surrounding nations may have used the title to refer to the primary god of their pantheon of gods. However, the people of Israel applied the title to the one true God, knowing there was no other God.

27. While the furnace had killed the king’s strongest men, the three Jewish *men* showed no evidence of exposure to

fire or smoke. The *princes, governors, captains, and counsellors* had bowed before the king’s image. But they ended up seeing the limits of the king’s power and the miraculous act of deliverance by the God of Israel.

28. The stories of Daniel 1–6 reveal a pattern to the ways that Babylon’s royalty regarded the work of God. First, Babylon’s king experienced a miraculous work of the God of Israel. Second, the king acknowledged the work as coming from the God of Israel. Third, in most instances, the king proclaimed the supremacy of Israel’s God.

This verse reveals that the same pattern occurred in today’s Scripture. Nebuchadnezzar saw God’s miraculous work of deliverance. As a result, the king proclaimed that God be *blessed*. The king *changed* his *word* and acknowledged that God’s power to save was unparalleled. However, the text does not indicate that the king believed *the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego* to be one, true, only God. Total and complete worship by the king to the one true God would eventually come.

The king’s confession of worship resulted from the character and faithfulness of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They refused to bow before the king’s image, even if their decision led to martyrdom, because of their commitment to the one true God. Their commitment to trust God was anchored in their rightly held belief in God’s faithfulness. The Lord had promised to be with His people, and that promise came to fruition for these three Jewish men. The promises made to the prophet Isaiah applied to the three men: “When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour” (Isaiah 43:2-3).

Involvement Learning

Faith in the Fiery Furnace

Into the Lesson

List instances of dramatic changes in fortune. Consider both positive and negative examples.

Everyone has problems, but none of us has faced a trial like the one we'll read about in today's text. Let's examine it to discover how faith in God made the difference for three men in this story.

Into the Word

Decide whether each of the following statements is true or false based on Daniel 3:19-28a. For each, write the verse reference to support your conclusion.

1. Nebuchadnezzar was forced by his advisors to throw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the furnace.

2. Nebuchadnezzar cooled the furnace down to prevent any fatalities.

3. One of Nebuchadnezzar's advisors went into the furnace with the Jewish men to help them.

4. Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers had a hot tale to tell their families that night!

5. No one acknowledged that anything unusual happened in the furnace.

6. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the furnace smelling smoky, with scorched clothes.

7. Nebuchadnezzar dismissed the whole affair as some sort of joke or magic trick.

Key Verse

Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.
—Daniel 3:28

Into Life

List possible trials that people face today. Circle the three or four trials that seem to be the hardest to bear.

How can you be a faithful witness to God both as a person facing that trial and as a person giving support to the sufferer?

What is one personal "fiery furnace" you are currently facing?

What is one way to be a faithful witness to God while dealing with this issue?

Thought to Remember

Because of God's faithfulness, we can be faithful to Him.