

Faith Facing Fire

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[0:00] So tonight we're going to look at the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3.

! But before we actually get into Daniel 3, let's remind ourselves of the context a little bit. And to do that, we'll back up to Daniel chapter 1. That's where we are first introduced to them.

Let's look at Daniel 1, 1 through 7 to start out. It says,

And if you skip down to verses 15 through 17 of chapter 1, you see the results of that.

We're showing. Very clear in those verses that God made that happen, right? And Nebuchadnezzar definitely noticed the difference in the four.

[2:47] Look at verses 18 through 20 of chapter 1. It says, It says, Daniel chapter 2 tells us that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were soon promoted to govern Babylon.

And that sets the stage for what we're going to look at tonight then in Daniel chapter 3. We're going to cover Daniel chapter 3, verses 1 through 29 with four one-word headings.

And in 3, 1 through 7, we're going to see the king make a demand. So demand is the first thing that you need to fill in in your handout there. Let's read about that demand.

3, 1 through 7 say,

So what was the king's demand?

[5:14] Yep. Nebuchadnezzar wanted them to worship the idol, and most likely that was an oversized statue meant to symbolize himself.

And the statue was not necessarily made of solid gold, but it more likely would have been overlaid with gold. That's consistent with several of the objects that had been found in the ruins of Babylon. And the height of the figure was about 90 feet, and the width was 9 feet. So it was a good-sized statue. And when we say that Nebuchadnezzar wanted everyone to worship the statue, that really was the case, because verse 2 says that the king called together all of the satraps, the administrators, the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the judges, the magistrates, and just in case they left anybody out, all the other officials of the provinces.

So the satraps were leaders over the regions, and administrators were military chiefs. Governors were the civil administrators. The judges in that day were government arbitrators.

And then magistrates were judges in the sense that we have judges today. And then officials is just a general term for other civil leaders of that day. So you get the idea that all of the leading officials from throughout the region were gathered before the statue for its dedication.

[6:38] And, of course, that was also a statement of unity behind Nebuchadnezzar's empire. And they wanted to show that the empire was rooted in the common worship of that golden image. And the officials' act of obedience signified submission not only by the officials themselves, but it also signified submission by the people that they ruled over as well.

So most of the officials readily complied with the demand to worship the statue. Why was that?

Yeah, they were definitely afraid not to.

In fact, they were literally afraid to be fired from their position. So that would be some powerful motivation for anybody, actually. But, you know, that was a literal statement because failing to obey the law would mean being thrown into the fiery furnace.

And some ancient kilns were found to have been shaped like a virtual tunnel that was open only at the top. And they would have a dome supported by columns. And they used charcoal, then, to fire those furnaces.

So you get the idea of what the demand was. Now we come to the second section of the narrative. And here we see the disobedience. And verses 8 through 18 tell us about the disobedience.

[8:01] We'll take that in pieces, and we'll read verses 8 through 12 first. So Daniel 3, 8 through 12 say, Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and accused the Jews.

They spoke and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, O King, live forever. 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.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning, fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

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. Those accusers were definitely motivated by jealousy because they referred to the fact that Nebuchadnezzar had set certain Jews over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

The jealousy probably sprang from the fact that it was very unusual for Jews who'd come over in captivity to rise to such a level of importance in the kingdom because subjugated people, like the Jewish people were, were normally relegated to positions of servitude.

[9:19] They weren't elevated to authority. So others then resented them because they had that high position of authority. And if we look at verse 13, we see that verse 13 shows that the reported accusers had the desired effect.

It says, Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So they brought these men before the king. Before we move on, let's consider whether Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were correct to disobey the king.

Because after all, if you look at Romans 13, 13, 1 and 2 in Romans are the verses that say, Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. So given what we just read in Romans 13 there, were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego correct to disobey the king?

We know that the Bible allows two exceptions to the command to obey authorities. One exception is where the government forbids us to do something that God commands.

[10:37] So that's where the government forbids us to do something that God commands. The other exception, then, is the reverse of that. That's where the government commands us to do something that God forbids.

And being commanded to do something that God forbids is really what comes into play here.

Because if we go back and look at the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, 3-5, they start out with, You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make yourself a carved image, any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them, nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments.

So you can see there that they were definitely being commanded to do something that God forbid. So then they're within their rights to disobey the king's command.

[11:44] And if we look at Acts 5.29 in the New Testament, we see another example of proper disobedience. And that, of course, was when the apostles were being asked not to preach any more of Jesus.

And Peter said in 5.29, that Peter and the apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men. So in tonight's passage, we do know then that the Israelites were correct to disobey.

And we're going to see proof of that later on. But for now, let's go ahead and resume where we left off in the narrative. Because when we paused, they had just been brought before the king.

So let's pick up again with Daniel 3, verses 14 and 15. It says, As Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?

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.

[12:48] 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? So when Nebuchadnezzar heard that the three refused to vow, he became furious with rage.

And even though he helped the men in high esteem, it still wasn't enough to prevent them from being subject to his authority. He still wanted them to obey the command that he had set up. Notice, though, that he didn't pass immediate judgment on them. He gave them another opportunity to bow before him so either they could prove the accusation wrong or maybe they could show they had a change of heart.

But the king also impressed upon them the importance of submitting to his decree because he reminded them again that the penalty for failing to obey him would be throwing into the fiery furnace.

And he said he would be carried out immediately, that they would be carried out immediately to do that. So we can tell then that Nebuchadnezzar considered himself above all gods because he asked a telling question at the end of verse 15.

[13:55] What was the question he asked at the end of verse 15 there? Right.

Who is that God who shall deliver you from my hands? And the question shows then that Nebuchadnezzar claimed absolute authority in both political and religious realms because he was challenging any god to circumvent his authority.

And when he did that then, the matter became a conflict between Nebuchadnezzar and the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Nebuchadnezzar really didn't realize what he was getting himself into at that point.

But look at the three Israelites' responses in verses 16 through 18. It says, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

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. 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.

[15:03] So in verse 16, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not being arrogant. They were simply admitting their guilt.

And let's look at verses 17 and 18 again. They actually demonstrated faith while facing the fire. 17 and 18 say, 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.

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. So the response of the Jewish young men is a model of confidence in God and submission to God's will because they recognize God's sovereignty and power and they knew that God could deliver them but they also recognize that God may have chosen not to do so in that case.

But even without knowing whether he had chosen to deliver them or not, they still expressed their faith in God. You know, that's an important thing to remember because faith in God doesn't always translate to victory in every circumstance.

But at least in the long term, we know that we'll have the ultimate victory from our faith in God. In this case, for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the short-term outcome was irrelevant.

[16:24] What was actually at stake was their faith and obedience to serve God regardless of the cost that they faced right away. That brings us to the third section of the study.

We'll see proof that the three were correct to disobey the demand. And the third section tells us about deliverance. So we'll read about the deliverance starting by looking at verses 19 through 21. 19 through 21 say, Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and cast them into the burning, fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats and their trousers, their turbans, and their outer garments and were cast into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace.

So notice that the king was so mad that he wanted the furnace to be even hotter than normal. And if you have any doubt that the fire was hot, look at verses 22 and 23.

[17:36] Verses 22 and 23 say, 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 Abednego.

And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down into the midst of the burning, fiery furnace. So the king's order resulted in the death of his own soldiers.

And that really demonstrated that the Lord is better able to protect his servants than Nebuchadnezzar could protect his own. And verses 24 through 27 are where we see the deliverance.

It says, Then 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.

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. Then Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning, fiery furnace and spoke, saying, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here.

[18:45] Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came from the midst of the fire, 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. So let's look at the verses in a little more detail.

Here are 24 and 25 again. They say, Then 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. Look, he answered, I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the fourth is like the Son of God. So Nebuchadnezzar was watching the proceedings from a safe distance, and when he looked into the furnace, he must have really been amazed, because the men who had been tied up were walking around in the fire, and they were unbound.

And instead of just seeing three men in the furnace, he saw a fourth, and he said the fourth was like a son of the gods. And the fourth man was either a Christophany, which is a physical appearance of Christ before his incarnation, or he was an angel.

[20:00] We're not sure exactly what is the case there. But in either case, it's a physical demonstration of God's presence with believers in distress. And you notice that the king is so amazed that he wants to get a closer look.

And that's where we picked up in 26 through 28 when it said, The Nebuchadnezzar went near the mouth of the burning fiery furnace and spoke, saying, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come here.

Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came from the midst of the fire, 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. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were completely untouched by the fire.

Not even their clothes were harmed or their hair singed from that, and they didn't even get the smell of fire on them, which is really amazing when you think about it, because think about being around somebody who smokes a cigarette.

[21:02] It's almost impossible to pick up or not pick up a smoke smell from that, but yet they were walking around in the fire and they didn't get any smell at all. And of course, that was a testimony to the Lord's protection.

The Lord made it clear that He just didn't save them, He saved them completely. So look back again at the question that Nebuchadnezzar asked in verse 15. That's where he said, Who is the God who will deliver you from my hands?

So did he get his question answered? Yes. And that brings us to the fourth section of the lesson. We've seen the demand, the disobedience, and the deliverance.

Now we see the decree. So let's read about that decree in verses 28 and 29. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him, and they have frustrated the king's word and yield their bodies that they should not serve nor worship any god except their own god.

Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation, or language which speaks anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be cut in pieces and their houses shall be made in eshe because there is no other god who can deliver like this.

[22:20] So Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges who rescued Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and he also decrees that nobody can say anything bad about their god. A lot of people think that's evidence that Nebuchadnezzar was saved at that time but the text really argues against that point and let's talk about why that is because pagan cultures didn't deny the existence of other gods even those of other peoples and Nebuchadnezzar only declared here that the god of the Jews was the god who was able to deliver and he forbade others to despise that god but in verse 28 if you look at it he describes god as the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and had Nebuchadnezzar been converted then he would have referred to god as my god rather than their god and then in verse 29 we see a second reference to the god of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and that verse ends with Nebuchadnezzar's statement that says there is no other god who can deliver like this and had he been saved then

Nebuchadnezzar likely would have said there is no other god and just left it at that what we see here though is that the king was really convinced and eager to add the god of these men to his collection of other gods that he already worshipped and soon he would learn that god was not one of many but the only god but that doesn't come until Daniel chapter 4 so you'll have to read that for homework tonight if you want to see that part but that brings us to the application section of this lesson because the narrative we read is certainly a great story but we know from 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 that all scripture is given by inspiration of god and is profitable for doctrine for reproof for correction for instruction and righteousness that the man of god may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work so let's consider what god wants us to learn from the lesson of the fiery furnace first god demonstrated his promise to be with us clearly we saw how god demonstrated his promise to be with us in that we see that not only in this section of scripture but this section of scripture is also a visual example of the promises in Isaiah 43:2 and John 14:16 and 17 so Isaiah 43:2 says when you pass through the waters

I will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overflow you when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned nor shall a flame scorch you so listen to that last part of 43:2 again it says when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned nor shall a flame scorch you does that sound a little bit like what we saw tonight in this example and then if we flip over to the new testament and go to John 14:16 and 17 Jesus said this about God the Holy Spirit Jesus said and I will pray the father and he will give you another helper that he may abide with you forever the spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him but you know him for he dwells with you and will be in you so we can see not only do we have the old testament promise that God will be with us we have the new testament promise that God will not only be with us but he will dwell in us through the Holy

Spirit the second thing we need to learn from this lesson is that God foreshadowed our ultimate deliverance deliverance you know that God's power is sometimes extended in dramatic ways to deliver his people just like we saw tonight but at other times the same power is withheld and his people are allowed to suffer instead and we know that Shadrach Meshach and Abednego were willing to suffer if necessary and even before it was written they knew what Paul would later voice in Philippians 121 of course Philippians 121 is the famous verse that says for me to live as Christ and to die as gain so Shadrach Meshach and Abednego knew that no matter what happened they were going to be okay the third thing we need to see from this is that

God proved that he is the one true God so once again God proved that he is the one true God I'm going to go back to Isaiah 44:6 as a cross reference here and in Isaiah 44:6 we see these words since thus says the Lord the King of Israel and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts I am the first and I am the last besides me there is no God so did we get proof of that tonight in how Nebuchad quote gods with a small g we're set straight and then finally we see that God received the glory and he received it even from pagans so once again God received the glory and he received it even from the pagans and God receiving glory from unbelievers actually gives us a glimpse of what we're

going to see at the end of the age and if we go back to

[27:57] Philippians 2 and look at Philippians 2 10 and 11 we see these words it says that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father notice there aren't any exceptions there it says every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and they do that to the glory of God the Father and that's why we see the episode here in Daniel as a foreshadowing of that later event and when we think about the episode of Shadrach Meshach and Abednego it also gives us an example of how we should respond when we face difficult situations because those three men place principle above pressure and of course in our lives it's so easy to do the reverse but we did see an example from them of how they put the principle above pressure and we saw that in 3.17 and 18 in particular look at those verses again

Daniel 3.17 and 18 say 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 but if not let it be known to you that we do not serve your gods nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up so they were confident that God could deliver them if he wanted to but even if he didn't want to in that case they weren't going to compromise their principles so that's why I said we see that they value principle over pressure and of course they modeled Romans 12 1 and 2 before the verses were written and Romans 12 1 and 2 say I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice holy acceptable to God which is your reasonable service and do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is good as what

Shadrach Meshach and Abednego did we do know that we will face pressure though and when we do face that pressure we can have similar confidence if we can remember what Nebuchadnezzar got right in Daniel 3 29 and that's when he said there is no other God who can deliver like this