

Old Testament Stories

“The Adventure of the Fiery Furnace”

Daniel 3:1-30

☞ What would you like to praise God for today?

☞ Pray for God's guidance as you study

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,^[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up.³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do:⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ At this time some astrologers^[b] came forward and denounced the Jews.⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live forever!¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold,¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

¹³ Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king,¹⁴ and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up?¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us^[c] from Your Majesty's hand.¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.²² The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?”

They replied, “Certainly, Your Majesty.”

²⁵ He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire,²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

²⁸ Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

1. What is the hottest you can remember being?

2. Why did Nebuchadnezzar insist everyone worship the golden image?

- A. He wanted to control them.
- B. He was committed to his god.
- C. He was insecure.
- D. He wanted to unite his people.

3. To better understand this story, look back at Daniel 1:1-6. Who were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? What do you learn about them?
4. What exception to Nebuchadnezzar's decree is duly noted in verses 3:8-12? By whom? Why would these people tip off the king?
5. Why is the king furious? What test does the king propose? Who is he really testing?
6. For you, what is the bottom line or climax in the classic testimony by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (v16-18)? What were they unsure about? What does this say about how martyrs for the faith ought to face their divine Maker and their human executioner?
7. What is remarkable about the fiery furnace? Who is killed? Why? Who manages to survive? How?
8. How do you explain the mysterious fourth figure:
 - A. An "angel" as does a Jewish tradition (see Ps.91:9-12)?
 - B. A "son of the gods" as does Nebuchadnezzar (who as a pagan king, affirms "polytheism" or many gods)?
 - C. "Son of God" as does an ancient Christian tradition?
Why do you think so?
9. Who has been – like the three young men – an example of trust that has drawn you to the Lord?
10. Read Isaiah 43:1-3 and Ps. 91. How is God with you in your sufferings?
11. What have trials to do with standing up for what you believe about God? (Read Corinthians 11:21-33 and Galatians 6:17; 1 Peter 4: 12-19)
12. How do you remain faithful "if he does not "rescue" you? What inspiration do you get from the Apostle Paul's experience (2 cor. 12:1-10)?

Prayer: For one another

LIFE GROUPS

A safe place to build friendships and grow spiritually.

L ♦ Learn.....	applying Biblical truth for everyday living
I ♦ Invite.....	welcoming others to our fellowship
F ♦ Fellowship.....	nurturing Christ centered caring relationships
E ♦ Evangelism.....	reaching others with the hope of Christ

DID YOU KNOW?

Persecution. The word generally brings to mind extreme physical abuse; something we've associated with notorious prison camps from World War II. Certainly the Holocaust was persecution for Jews and non-Jews alike. But the word encompasses less obvious forms as well.

In Daniel 1 we learn that Daniel and his friends were seized from royal and noble Jewish homes in the Babylonian invasion of Israel. **Persecution.**

Have you ever been forced from a community, work place, or membership because of your faith? Then you too know what it means to be persecuted.

Their Jewish names were changed. Hananiah, meaning '*God is gracious*' was renamed Shadrach, meaning '*command of the moon god*.' Mishael, meaning '*who is like God?*' was renamed, Meshack meaning '*who is Aku?*' Azariah's name meant '*God has helped*'. His captors changed it to Abednego meaning '*servant of Nebo*' or '*servant of the god Ner*'. **Persecution.**

Have you ever had your identity attacked with a malicious nickname? Then you too can identify with these men. Such identity attacks are persecution.

Once in Babylon, these men are forced to eat meals counter to their kosher upbringing. **Persecution.** Daniel (1:8-20) offers a solution that allows them to retain their godly lifestyle in this area. In fact the verse 20 reveals that God blesses them even in their Babylonian captivity; a success that would engender its own reprisal.

Reflect on the last time you were pressured to attend a dinner party or event where you felt forced to partake of food or beverages counter to your stand as a Christian. Awkward? Uncomfortable? Humiliating? If so, you too have experienced persecution.

The favor the God gave these men even during their captivity, sowed seeds of jealousy amongst their colleagues. They report the three Jewish men to King Nebuchadnezzar. Prior to this he was unaware they weren't complying with his idol program (4:8-12) And you can bet that their slander was said in a salacious manner. The king became enraged. **Persecution.**

Have you ever suffered because of another's backbiting or gossip? If you have suffered because of your faithful stand for Christ, then you too have experienced persecution.

Persecution. It is the heritage of every Christian who becomes a committed Christ follower. 1 Timothy 3:12 says, "*everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*," Jesus personally warned, "*I have told your these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble*." Don't be deceived. Following Christ is not comfortable. However the balance of Jesus warning reassures us. Not only is Christ WITH us, but the current trial is only TEMPORARY. Jesus continues. "*But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33)

Persecution. It is such a big word. It seems the kind of thing that happens to Christians "over there" – somewhere foreign. It is the stuff of missionary stories and cannibal villages or godless nations. And to be fair persecution does happen there. But it also happens in less obvious ways. The truth is that however you are persecuted for your stand for Christ, He is present in that trial with you. It is in Daniel 4 that we see God's presence in the furnace. What King Nebuchadnezzar didn't realize is that God had been present all along. As Christ followers we are NEVER separated from God's empowering presence. Big or small, short or long, through trial or peace, He is with us. Hebrews 13:5,6 says, "*God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'*" Take heart. God will never leave your side.