

#16 - The people of God in exile - Daniel 3:1-30

Engage:

- In the last story we saw that there were kings in Israel and Judah who were very wicked men. These kings brought great distress upon the God's people. Eventually God allowed the people of Judah to be taken to Babylonian captivity because of their wickedness. Nebuchadnezzar was the reigning king in Babylon. The Babylonian army had reduced the temple in Jerusalem to a pile of rubble. The territory of Judah was occupied by an enemy and a number of the people of Judah had been taken hundreds of miles from home to Babylon – but God did not leave Israel. His character was upheld. He continued to answer prayers, interpret dreams and honor the integrity of those who remained committed to Him.

This story is about how three Jewish men defied the ruler of Babylon - Nebuchadnezzar. They did not give in to his edict which went against their religious conviction. They enabled God to demonstrate His redemptive power in delivering them from the fiery furnace.

Thoughts about the story:

Idolatry Or Death (Daniel 3:1-18)

vv. 1-12 – In this story the king commanded his subjects to worship an image of gold. This image is thought by some to be that of Nebuchadnezzar. It was huge – 90' tall and 9' wide. To disobey the king's edict meant punishment by being thrown into a fiery furnace.

Note: Nebuchadnezzar called 8 different types of officials to come and bow down. This command seemed to have both a religious and political significance.

Note: Nebuchadnezzar must have believed that every person had a price that he or she would not pay in order to remain faithful to their convictions. But he was wrong!

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood firm. They surely knew the Ten Commandments, in particular the first two (Exodus 20:1-6). They must have also been convicted not to worship the image of a man, since they were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).

Note: It is thought that some of the king's officials did not like the Jewish men who had been elevated to a position of authority, especially when they did not submit to the king's edict.

Note: These three men taught a power lesson in faithfulness.

vv. 13-15 – The king was furious, but was willing to give Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego another chance to show that they had been falsely accused.

vv. 16-18 – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego showed respect to Nebuchadnezzar in their response. But they held firm to their convictions. Obeying God was more important to them than life. They clearly stated that they believed that God was greater than Nebuchadnezzar or any god for that matter. They believed that God could rescue them, but if He didn't, that was okay too.

The Faith That Shined Brighter Than The Fiery Furnace (Daniel 3:19-30)

vv. 19-23 – The attitude of Nebuchadnezzar changed toward the three Jewish men. He commanded that the furnace be heated to be seven times hotter than usual. The three men were bound and thrown into the furnace. The fire was so hot that the soldiers who threw

them into the fire perished, but . . .

vv. 24-27 – Then things changed! As King Nebuchadnezzar watched in amazement, he saw that there were four men in the fire, rather than three. They were unbound and walking around. The fire must have burned the ropes that bound them. He said that the fourth looked like the “son of the gods.” This means that he must have thought the fourth person was supernatural. Note: There are many who think that the fourth man was a preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

The attitude that Nebuchadnezzar had about the three Jewish men changed and the God they served. He called them “servants of the Most High God.” He called them to come out of the fire. They did as told. Their bodies were not burned. Their hair was not singed. Their clothes were not scorched and there was “no smell of fire on them.”

vv. 28-30 – Nebuchadnezzar demonstrated his newfound respect for the living God – and for the three Jewish men who defied the king’s edict in their loyalty to God even though it could have cost them their lives.

As a result, the king issued another decree. He said that anyone from any nation who speaks against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would “be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble.”

The king honored Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego by promoting them to greater position in the kingdom of Babylon.

This story began with a threat, but ended with a triumph because of God’s redemptive power.

Extra:

- “Picture this scene in your mind. An enemy army has swooped down upon your nation, inflicting destruction and death. Your city is a smoking ruin; your church lies in rubble; your possessions have been destroyed. The fate of your family and friends is unknown. Only memories remain of what, hours before, you called home. All you have left is your confidence in God. Would that be enough!

For you today, that may be only an academic exercise; for Daniel it became the chilling reality of life. With nothing to cling to but God, Daniel found that God was all he needed. When Daniel and his friends found themselves literally in the ‘frying pan,’ they discovered that the promises of God stand up well in the crucible of life!

‘I never knew Jesus Christ was all I needed . . . until Jesus Christ was all I had.’ Have you ever heard anyone express that feeling? Don’t wait for an ‘exile experience’ in *your* life before you learn that lesson. You can come to grips with it . . . today . . . as you walk with Daniel through the early years of his captivity in Babylon. You’ll know you have learned that lesson when you can pray from your heart the words of Daniel in 2:20-23, and of Daniel’s friends in 3:17-18. Why not do that right now?” - *DW*, August 1988

- “It is better to die for a conviction than to live with a compromise.” (unknown)

- “Conditions in our country have not yet reached the critical stage that calls for God’s people to suffer physical abuse. There are many social pressures put upon Christians who hold firm to their convictions. Even the economic squeeze is sometimes invoked. Quite often Christians lose in the business world because they will not ‘go along’ or because they ‘do not

fit' in certain circles. There are certain indications on the horizon that 'it could happen—even here.' God's people must always be ready to stand firm in their witness regardless of the cost. Whatever happens to God's people, he will be with them. It is this consciousness that gives strength for the meeting of crises. When wicked people see Christians holding firm and possessing inner strength they will honor God and God's servant. It is not easy to maintain one's integrity in the face of opposition but this is the very essence of the Christian faith. (The Teacher's Bible Commentary)

- "Some people are so indecisive their favorite color is plaid! You ask them if they have trouble making decisions, and their response is, 'Well, yes and no.'" (DW, August 2002)

- The names that were changed:

Hebrew Name

Daniel ("God's Prince")

Hannaniah ("Mercy of Jehovah)

Mishael ("Who is what God is?")

Azariah ("Jehovah helps")

Babylonian Name:

Belteshazzar ("Bel's Place")

Shadrach ("Command of Aku")

Meshach ("Who is what Akai is?")

Abed-nego ("Servant of Nebo")