

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego: Freedom in the Furnace

The names of our heroes in this Bible story are Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, better known to us as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Hananiah means "God is gracious"; Shadrach means "Command of Aku (moon god)." Mishael means "Who is like the Lord"; Meshach means, "Who is what Aku is" (Some scholarship says this name is in reference to the Babylonian god, Marduk). Azariah means "God is strong"; Abednego means "Servant of Nebo (god of wisdom)." While the Hebrew children were in captivity, their names were changed (Daniel chapter 1). Daniel's name, meaning "God is my Judge," was changed to Belteshazzar meaning "Keeper of the hidden treasures of Bel." The reason for the name change in Babylon is disclosed by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:8 when he declared, "...Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god...." So we see the Babylonians were intent on "Babylonianizing" these Hebrew young men. The ways of the world have never really changed. If the Devil cannot keep young people from getting saved, he will do everything he can to negate their godly influence after they are saved and making them unhappy by seducing them into "worldliness." This is a good place to be reminded that the grace of God was never intended to give us a license to conform to this world, but to rise above its influence. *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world"* (Titus 2:11,12). *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Romans 12:2).

This is the story of the three Hebrew children who did not bow, did not bend and finally did not burn. Let us give thought to this story and make application. It is as relevant for God's people today as it ever has been.

I. The Prideful Pontiff

Daniel 3:1, 2. Daniel prophesied the rise and fall of world empires. Babylon was gold; Media-Persia was brass; Greece was silver and Rome was

iron. In Daniel 2:38, Daniel describe Nebuchadnezzar thusly, *"...Thou art this head of gold."* One might say that this prophecy, rather than bringing him to repentance, went to his head. When sin is not dealt with, it escalates. The first two of the Ten Commandments were broken by this prideful pontiff; God declared, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them..."* (Exodus 20:3-5a).

II. The Manipulative Mob

Daniel 3:3-7. Beware of those who, if they cannot be king, will be kingmakers. This is often the undergirding of politics in any culture. We see a front man being manipulated from the "smoke-filled rooms" of party politics, like a Pinocchio pulled by strings. A statesman will rise above the smoke and will suffer before he is made anybody's slave. *"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe"* (Proverbs 29:25).

III. The Yielded Youth

Daniel 3:8-18. Jeremiah cried out in Lamentations 3:27, *"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth."* Paul said in I Timothy 4:12, *"Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity."* Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were certainly examples to all believers for all time that it pays to serve Jesus. They did the right thing, no matter what. They did not base their decisions on the consequences of making the right choice. They did not find the direction the wind was going and go that way. They stood for God and for right, whether they were blessed or cursed, whether they lived or died. I love the words of Tertullian when the carnal Christians he was pastoring demanded that, although they made idols to Jupiter or Venus, they only did this for a living and then defended their action by saying, *"...and we have to live, don't we?"* I love the brave reply of Tertullian: *"Must ye live?"* We may have to take our cross and die, but we don't have to live. Nebuchadnezzar was filled with *"...rage and fury..."*, but this did not dissuade our young heroes from their mighty stand for God. They were even given a second chance to change their minds and bow down before the image (Daniel 3:15). When one is in the right, he or she must remain true, for right can never be negotiated. Compromise is not on the table when it comes to convictions.

IV. The Declared Deity

Daniel 3:15-18. The gauntlet was thrown down when Nebuchadnezzar asked, "...*And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?*" (Daniel 3:15c). We learn much from the brief but poignant and succinct answer of the three Hebrew heroes. We see the true Deity is:

A. A God that provides a worry-free environment.

"...*O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter*" (Daniel 3:16b). In other words, our we are "too blessed to be stressed" or as one servant of the Lord told me, "too anointed to be disappointed." No other deity or man-made god can provide this kind of protection. Meditate on Psalm 91 and you will readily see where Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego received their strength.

B. A God who is able and willing.

Daniel 3:17: "*If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king.*" Genesis 18:14 gives forth the challenge, "*Is any thing too hard for the LORD?*" The prophet asks the same question in Jeremiah 32:27, "*Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?*" God dogmatically states, "*Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee*" (Jeremiah 32:17).

God is declared to be Jehovah-Elyon, The Most High God, "*For thou, LORD, art High Above All the earth: thou art exalted far above all gods*" (Psalm 97:9). I like to think of it like this: everything that is over our head is under His feet!

C, A God who takes care of us in this life and afterwards.

Daniel 3:18 gives us one of the most trustful, loving and faithful replies found in Scripture and it is disclosed in the first three words, "*But if not...*" If God brings us through the fire unharmed, we will praise Him. If He takes us to Heaven through the fire, we still win. We serve the God who conquered death, Hell and even the grave!

Conclusion: What the Fiery Trial Reveals

1 Peter 4:12: *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."* 1 Corinthians 3:13 *"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."*

1. Righteousness will ultimately be vindicated – Daniel 3:19-22
2. What we lose: There is freedom in the furnace - Daniel 3:23-25a
3. Who we gain: There is fellowship in the furnace - Daniel 3: 25b
4. Testimony that will triumph in time and eternity – Daniel 3:26-30

Isaiah 43:2 is as much for you and me as it was for Israel, *"...when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."* Daniel 3: 27 is as true for us as it was for the three heroes of story: *"...upon whose bodies the fire had not power...."* Isaiah 54:17 is a verse all who know Christ may claim: *"No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD."*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.