

THE THREE HEBREW CHILDREN

BIBLE TEXT : Daniel 3:1-30

LESSON 420 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. 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. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:16-18).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Daniel 3:1-30

¹ Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height *was* threescore cubits, *and* the breadth thereof six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.

² Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

³ Then the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁴ Then an herald cried aloud, To you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages,

⁵ *That* at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up:

⁶ And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I The Dedication of the King's Image of Gold

1. An image 90 feet by 9 feet is erected near Babylon, Daniel 3:1; **Daniel 2:31-32**

³¹ Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. This great image, whose brightness *was* excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof *was* terrible.

³² This image's head *was* of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass,

Psalms 115:4

⁴ Their idols *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands.

Psalms 115:8

⁸ They that make them *are* like unto them; *so is* every one that trusteth in them.

Isaiah 2:20

²⁰ In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made *each one* for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

Revelation 9:20

²⁰ And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk:

2. The officials of the king's realm attend the dedication, Daniel 3:2, 3.
3. All the people are commanded at the sound of music to worship the image, Daniel 3:4-7.

II Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego Cast into the Fiery Furnace

1. The three Hebrew children are accused of disregarding the king's command and his gods, Daniel 3:8-12.
2. They refuse to submit to the king's repeated command, Daniel 3:13-18;

Matthew 10:18-19

¹⁸ And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

¹⁹ But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

Matthew 10:28

²⁸ And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Job 13:15

¹⁵ Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.

3. The king, in a rage, sentences them to the fiery-furnace, Daniel 3:19, 20;

Psalms 76:10

¹⁰ Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.

Psalms 50:15

¹⁵ And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

⁷ Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down *and* worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.

⁸ Wherefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and accused the Jews.

⁹ They spake and said to the king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live for ever.

¹⁰ Thou, O king, hast made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, shall fall down and worship the golden image:

¹¹ And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth, *that* he should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

¹² There are certain Jews whom thou hast set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not regarded thee: they serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in *his* rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king.

¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, *Is it true*, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?

¹⁵ Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have

4. The three Hebrews are cast into the furnace, and their executioners are slain, Daniel 3:21-23;

Psalm 23:3-4

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

2 Timothy 4:17-18

¹⁷ Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

¹⁸ And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve *me* unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.

III The Miraculous Deliverance and the King's Astonishment

1. "Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?" Daniel 3:24.
2. "Lo, I see four . . . and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Daniel 3:25.
3. They came forth before all without the smell of fire, Daniel 3:26, 27;

Hebrews 11:34

³⁴ Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Isaiah 43:2

² When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

Psalm 34:7

⁷ The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

4. Nebuchadnezzar pays tribute to the God of Israel, Daniel 3:28, 29.
5. God's faithful servants are promoted, Daniel 3:30

NOTES:

Golden Image

It is possible that Nebuchadnezzar's inspiration to build a great image came from his dream some years before when he saw an image of a man erected upon a high pillar. This grand and costly monument, 90 feet high, was to be dedicated to his own honour. Daniel had said in his interpretation of the dream, "Thou art this head of gold." Daniel had also reminded him that the God of Heaven had given him this kingdom of power. This high-minded king gave no thought to these words, or he might have hesitated to exalt himself. Thus Nebuchadnezzar, glorying in the power bestowed upon him, seems to have been a type of the antichrist who also will have an image erected to his honour (Revelation 13:14). One of our more recent dictators of Europe erected an image to himself in Rome, 250 feet in height.

Forbidden

We read in Exodus 20:23: "Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold." Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, caused Israel to sin by his erecting two calves of gold, one at Bethel and the other at Dan. (See I Kings 12:29.)

Officials Gather

The assembled gathering of princes, governors, military

made; *well*: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who *is* that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we *are* not careful to answer thee in this matter.

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.

¹⁸ But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

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.

²⁴ Then Nebuchadnezzar the king

officers, chief judges, financial experts, senators and heads of law enforcement were willing to pay homage to the king. We see much of political expediency rather than firm principle in our day. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had been appointed officials over the affairs of the province of Babylon (Daniel 2:49). They were in the same group on the plain of Dura. They heard the same instructions as all others present. When the Chaldean symphony started to play, God raised up a standard in their hearts as He had spoken through the mouth of Isaiah in chapter 59, verse 19, more than 100 years before: "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him." Many are swept along with the gay and giddy throng by the modern music of our day. Great mobs of people carry many weaker souls on the crest of the wave of popular opinion; but God has a deeper work for the heart than just a mental assent. The "new birth" brings faith into the heart that believes "if God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Notwithstanding the obligations they may have felt, nor fearing the power their king could exercise as an absolute monarch, the three Hebrews nobly and courageously refused to violate the purpose of their hearts in being true to their God. Jesus later very clearly defined our stand on these matters when He said, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). The things of state belong to the king, and things of worship belong to God.

No Other God

The king's edict violated the first of the Ten Commandments. No other nation but that of the Jews would feel this edict oppressive, for it did not prevent the heathen from worshipping their own gods besides. It was evidently aimed at the Jews by those who were jealous of their high position in the king's court. They therefore induced the king to pass an edict concerning all nonconformists, representing such a refusal of homage as an act of treason to Nebuchadnezzar, the civil and religious "head" of the empire. Their accusation, "They serve not thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up," served to incite the king to greater anger.

Testimony for True God

The answer to the king's query given by the three young men is a classic example of fearless trust in God. They wanted the king to know that they would not parley with sin nor beg the issue over a matter that had plunged their nation into captivity, namely idolatry. God permitted them to be brought before the king that their testimonies might be heard and the witness for the true God be made known to the whole world.

King's Defiance

When Nebuchadnezzar asked the question, "Who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" it caught the ear of God as did Sennacherib's taunt when Isaiah told the Assyrian messengers that God would deliver Israel out of the hands of the Assyrians. Sennacherib boasted: "Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?" (II Kings 18:35). Pharaoh made a similar boast: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" (Exodus 5:2). God has told us who He is: He said: "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8). He has also said: ``God is

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.

²⁹ Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and

the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Psalm 75:7); and "There is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). So who is man that he should boast against the Almighty God?

Wrath Cruel

The king's anger knew no bounds when he was confronted with the Hebrews' fearless assurance of the omnipotence of the God of Israel. The furnace was heated seven times more than it was ever seen to be heated. Fully clothed, they were bound and cast into the furnace. The strongest men of the army, those to be most feared, were slain by the heat. The captives fell down bound into the midst of the fiery furnace. These young men could have questioned the advisability of such a firm stand that would exact such a price for loyalty when all that was required was a mere bowing of the knee to the image; but there was no compromise in them. They would not give any pretence of conforming to that command. God's Word tells us: Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:22).

When our faith is under severe test and trial it is well to remember the Apostle Paul: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Murmuring or complaining about our lot only serves the enemy's purpose. It has been said that what happens to us is not so important as what we do with it. It may be used as a steppingstone to higher heights in God or become a stumbling block that could cause us to fall if we take our eyes from the Captain of our Salvation.

God's Intervention

When the king looked into the furnace, rather than seeing the end of the dissenters, he saw not three but four men; and the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. Again God's mercy was revealing the power of the true God to this haughty monarch. The captives in the furnace found that the fire had only released them from their bonds, and they arose and walked. We have fiery trials, too, the purpose of which is explained in I Peter 1:7: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." As we surrender to God in our trials, we find we are released from the cares and anxieties of this life, bringing greater freedom in Christ (**Luke 21:34** ³⁴ And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. **Luke 21:36** ³⁶ Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.).

Awaiting God's Time

They did not try to escape, but awaited the king's command to come forth, just as Noah waited in the ark after the Flood until God brought him forth (**Genesis 8:12-18** ¹² And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more. ¹³ And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first *month*, the first *day* of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. ¹⁴ And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried. ¹⁵ And God spake unto Noah, saying, ¹⁶ Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. ¹⁷ Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, *both* of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be

Abednego, in the province of Babylon.

fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. ¹⁸ And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him). The king's acknowledgment that they were servants of the Most High God made all other gods inferior to theirs. He concluded by saying, "There is no other God that can deliver after this sort." God surely showed His power to deliver the righteous in that there was not even the smell of smoke on their garments, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed. Contrast this with the destruction of the most mighty men in the king's army. The law of the king was changed by the God of Heaven. It has been said that "man proposes, but God disposes. Faithfulness to God brought promotion from their earthly king and the smile of approval from the heavenly King.

QUESTIONS

1. How was Nebuchadnezzar affected by his dream?
2. Illustrate his progress in the knowledge of the true God.
3. What commandment did the Hebrews have in mind in refusing to bow to the image?
4. What promise in the Book of Isaiah covers this incident?
5. Who visited the Hebrew children in the furnace?
6. Explain what the fire did.
7. Did it pay the Hebrew children to be true to God? and why?
8. Why did not God deliver them from going into the furnace?
9. What effect did this miracle have on the world of that day?